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VOLUME XXIII, NO 2, 2002

PREFACE.....	5
--------------	---

◆ ARTICOLI ◆

ROBERTA MOROSINI

'Poliphonic Parthenope: Boccaccio's Letter XIII and his 'Plebeian' Naples, According to Domenico Rea.....	7
--	---

ISABELLA BERTOLETTI

Petrarch's <i>Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta</i> : Mourning Laura.....	25
---	----

PATRIZIA GUIDA

Ada Negri: una scrittrice fascista?.....	45
--	----

REBECCA HOPKINS

Re-examining Female Desire: Inheritance Law, Colonialism, and Folklore in Grazia Deledda "La Volpe" .....	59
--	----

CRISTINA MAZZONI

Braiding Mysticism, Literature, Theory: The Case of Margaret Mazzantini's <i>Non ti muovere</i> .....	87
--	----

GRAZIA SOTIS

Per una rilettura di Gozzano.....	101
-----------------------------------	-----

LUCIANO PARISI

I romazi di Natalia Ginzburg.....	107
-----------------------------------	-----

◆ RECENSIONI ◆

<i>The Cambridge Companion to Piero della Francesca</i> , ed. Jeryldene M. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Pp. xvi, 268. Figs. 94.	
--	--

JACQUELINE MARIE MUSACCHIO.....	121
---------------------------------	-----

<i>Going for Baroque. Cultural Transformations 1550-1650</i> , ed. Francesco Guardiani. Ottawa-New York-Toronto: Legas, 1999. Pp. 190.	
---	--

ROBERT BURANELLO.....	123
-----------------------	-----

---

<i>Saints and the Sacred</i> , eds. Joseph Goering, Francesco Guardiani, Giulio Silano. Ottawa: Legas, 2001. Pp. 225.	
JENNIFER A. SLIWKA .....	126
<i>The Flight of Ulysses. Studies in Memory of Emmanuel Hatzantonis</i> , ed. Augustus A. Mastri. Chapel Hill, NC: Annali d'italianistica, 1997. Pp. 359.	
JESS PAEHLKE .....	128
<i>Naples in the Eighteenth Century: The Birth and Death of a Nation State</i> , ed. Girolamo Imbruglia. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000. Pp. ix, 204.	
CHRISTOPHER CARLSMITH .....	130
<i>Niccolò Tommaseo e Firenze. Atti del Convegno di studi, Firenze, 12-13 febbraio 1999</i> , ed. Roberta Turchi and Alessandro Volpi. Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 2000. Pp. xi, 384.	
ANNE URBANCIC .....	132
Doumanis, Nicholas. <i>Italy: Inventing the Nation Series</i> . NY: Oxford University Press / London: Arnold, 2001. Pg. x, 190.	
JAMIE SMITH .....	135
<i>Theatre and the Visual Arts</i> , eds. Giuliana Sanguinetti Katz, Vera Golini and Domenico Pietropaolo. Ottawa: Legas, 2001. Pg. 296. Figs. 88.	
LAURIE SHEPARD .....	137
Klopp, Charles. <i>Sentences: The Memoirs and Letters of Italian Political Prisoners from Benvenuto Cellini to Aldo Moro</i> . Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999. Pp. xv, 276.	
ROSARIA MORETTI .....	138
<i>ItaliAfrica: Bridging Continents and Cultures</i> , ed. Sante Matteo. Stony Brook, NY: Forum Italicum Publishing, 2001. Pp. xii, 410.	
ANGELO PRINCIPE .....	140
<i>Pluralism and Literary Practice. Essays in Honor of Albert N. Mancini</i> . West Lafayette: Bordighera Press, 1999. Pp. 330.	
MARIO D'ALESSANDRO .....	143
<i>Women, Gender, and Transnational Lives. Italian Workers of the World</i> , eds. Donna R. Gabaccia and Franca Iacovetta. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002. Pp. xvi, 433 pp., ill.	
PATRIZIA BETTELLA .....	145
Fenu Barbera, Rossana. <i>La donna che cammina. Incanto e mito della seduzione del passo femminile nella poesia italiana del primo Novecento</i> . Ravenna: Longo, 2001. Pp. 153.	
PATRIZIA BETTELLA .....	148

Dombroski, Robert S. <i>Creative Entanglements: Gadda and the Baroque</i> . Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999. Pp. x, 151.	
PAOLO CHIRUMBOLO .....	150
Nanni, Luciano. <i>Communication: The Power of Location. Essays on Adespotic Aesthetics</i> , trans. Corrado Federici. Semiotics and the Human Sciences, 19. New York: Peter Lang, 2000. Pp. 197.	
THOMAS HARRISON .....	152
Parisi, Luciano. <i>Borgese</i> . Torino: Tirrenia Stampatori, 2000. Pp. 96.	
ANTONIO D. PAGLIARO .....	154
Paolozzi, Ernesto. <i>Benedetto Croce. Logica del reale e il dovere della libertà</i> . Napoli: Libreria Editrice E. Cassitto, 1998. Pp. 91.	
MASSIMO VERDICCHIO .....	156
Zangrilli, Franco. <i>Sicilia isola-cosmo. Conversazione con G. Bonaviri</i> . Ravenna: Longo, 1998. Pp. 126.	
JANA VIZMULLER-ZOCCO .....	159



## PREFACE

In line with its constitution, in the spring of 2003 the Canadian Society of Italian Studies elected a new slate of members to the Editorial Board of its journal, *Quaderni d'italianistica*. Then, after the results were announced at the Society's annual general meeting (31 May 2003, Halifax, NS), the newly elected Board members met, discussed the current state of the journal, and elected from among themselves a new editor and a new book review editor. The Board also agreed to renew Dr Manuela Scarsi's position as Business Manager and to ask a new group of esteemed colleagues to serve on the Advisory Committee. All these changes have now been implemented and the new governing structure of the journal is in place. You may consult it on the inside of the front cover of the journal.

As I assume the editorial reins, I am keen to thank my predecessor, Prof. Francesco Guardiani, for the years of service he has generously given to the journal. We are all grateful to him and thank him for his devotion and labour. I, in particular, look forward to his continued participation in our venture as a member of the Advisory Committee.

Special thanks are also in order to the past members of the Editorial Board and of the Advisory Committee. During the previous four years their input and advice has been much valued both by Prof. Guardiani, as editor, and by me, as Book Review Editor (at that time).

As I begin my mandate and look forward to the next four years of work, I am grateful to see on the new Editorial Board and Advisory Board of *Quaderni d'italianistica* the names of scholars whose profound knowledge of Italian literature, culture, language, history, and art will, without a doubt, contribute greatly to the smooth running and efficient management of the journal. I am grateful to them for having agreed to serve and I can promise them all that I will often call upon them for advice and counsel.

Lastly, I would like to encourage all readers of *Quaderni d'italianistica* to make this their journal of first choice when publishing their work. I look forward to being swamped with submissions and to being able to publish the best from members of our society and from our readers all over the globe.

Alla prossima,

Konrad Eisenbichler  
Editor



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ROBERTA MOROSINI

‘POLYPHONIC’ PARTHENOPE:  
BOCCACCIO’S LETTER XIII AND HIS ‘PLEBEIAN’  
NAPLES, ACCORDING TO DOMENICO REA

“È chiaro che preferisco il Boccaccio realistico  
e napoletano, quello scrittore che non riesce  
a staccarsi dalla realtà e che invano tenterà d’imitare  
il venerato Dante e l’adorato amico Petrarca”  
(Rea, “Boccaccio a Napoli” 264).

In 1960, Domenico Rea wrote “Boccaccio a Napoli” (*Il re e il lustrascarpe* 252-274). In this article, he passionately but, alas, unsuccessfully tries to prove that Boccaccio had a sincere desire to describe realistically the condition of the Neapolitan poor. In any case, Rea’s article allows us to reconsider the impact that both courtly and plebeian Naples had on Boccaccio’s imagination: What was Naples for the young Boccaccio? A peaceful, elegant court or a “falling forest”? Was it aristocratic or exclusively plebeian? At different times, Boccaccio expresses different feelings toward this city: he speaks highly of it, but also condemns it as a “selva, perché come nelle selve dimorano gli animali bruti, così nelle città abitano gli uomini bruti, i quali nello stile predetto talora si chiamano pecore, talora capretti e buoi” (“Naples is a forest, for just as wild animals live in the woods, so do men in the cities, and, similarly, I sometimes call men sheep, goats, and oxen” Letter XXIII,9 ed. Auzzas).<sup>1</sup>

In the attempt to provide, if not an answer, then a further consideration of these questions, I will examine two of Boccaccio’s letters, XIII to Francesco Nelli, which is at the focus of Rea’s article, and the so-called Neapolitan Letter to Franceschino. Finally, I will discuss Boccaccio’s Neapolitan works to show that his interest in the lower classes does not extend to a concern for their faith, as Rea claims. A relevant trace of the plebeian or ‘other’ Naples can definitely be found by adopting a different point of view; that is, by recognizing Boccaccio’s auditory sensitivity in rendering the *vocio*, the din of voices rising from the city, a strictly Neapolitan form of polyphony. With all due respect to the historical and hermeneutic

value of Bakhtin's critical category I use the term *polyphony* here to refer specifically to the *vocio*. I believe that Boccaccio's accurate reproduction of the *vocio* can be found in all his Neapolitan works and, interestingly enough, even in Rea's own novel *La Ninfa plebea* as well as his critical essay on Neapolitan writers and playwrights in his anthology *Il re e il lustroscarpe*.

Remembering that Boccaccio spent almost ten years in Naples (1327-1340) is crucial to understanding some aspects of his work. If, by now, the strong influence of the French Angevin court on Boccaccio's courtly and chivalric production is well established, little is known about the impact of popular Naples on his sensibility and imagination. As Salvatore Battaglia realized: "In all Boccaccio's works -from the *Filocolo* to the *Decameron* – there is an element of fantasy and creativity and, above all, a healthy love for life, mankind, events, and passions that bears the sign of Naples, of a free, instinctive, spontaneous environment in which reality always holds the fascination of things that renew themselves, in particular the feeling of a confident, free, and easy delight in living." (*Il Filocolo*, 582). Is Battaglia referring to a *napoletaneità* inspired by the aristocratic and courtly Naples of the House of Anjou frequented by Boccaccio, as other scholars, such as Torracca, would have it?<sup>2</sup> For Torracca, the Naples that Boccaccio knew best was the one he describes in pages that also document the history of customs; namely, the courtly Naples.

Rea does not share Torracca's view and believes that Boccaccio showed a certain ambivalence in his "double life" as man and writer: "Boccaccio's double life would thus proceed along two lines, sometimes clearly separated and sometimes blurred and blended." On the one hand, according to Rea, Boccaccio loved and admired the elegant life of the court and theatres; on the other, he was sympathetic to the plight of the common people who lived in wretched poverty. Rea concludes that Boccaccio was more sympathetic toward the common people than to the court of King Robert, to the point of denouncing their miserable living conditions. Rea seems to forget that Boccaccio at times shows a certain indignation toward the common people and likens their dwellings to Hell, as in Letters II and XIII. I do not intend to establish which of the "two lives" or two sides of the city most inspired Boccaccio: the aristocratic Naples or the harbour and streets; it would be an idle exercise. However, Rea exclusively discusses neglected and definitely uncourtly evidence of passages about Naples in Boccaccio's work. According to Rea, Boccaccio in the Partenopeian city "prepared himself not only to become Boccaccio but, in the process, became a great writer, because he first became a Neapolitan" ("Boccaccio a Napoli" 262-263).<sup>3</sup>

Certainly, Boccaccio's early works reveal how he perceived the courtly city of the "secondo Salomone", as he called King Robert of Anjou in the *Genealogia Deorum Gentilium* (XIV, 9). It is also true that, as Charmaine Lee highlights, "although Boccaccio spoke highly of Naples, his relationship with Robert was never that enjoyed by Petrarch. Boccaccio, like Dante, had very little good to say about Robert, whom he considered rather dull witted" (146). Boccaccio came into contact with the French vernacular tradition at the court, but outside Robert's restricted intellectual circle. It would be interesting to ascertain if Boccaccio was ever concerned with the lower classes, as Rea claims about Naples.

Rea uses Letter XIII to Francesco Nelli to prove Boccaccio's consciousness of the lower classes. This letter was written in 1363 and evokes the very much desired, but frustrating journey he made to Naples in 1362 following an invitation from Niccolò Acciaiuoli, the Grand Seneschal to Joan I and Louis of Taranto.<sup>4</sup> Boccaccio vigorously replies to Francesco Nelli, who in a previous letter had called Boccaccio a "uomo di vetro" ("a man of glass"), but he is mainly upset with Niccolò, and not only because the Grand Seneschal used to call him "Iohannes tranquillitatum"! In fact, since the moment of his departure from Florence, toward the end of 1341, Boccaccio had been waiting for Niccolò to offer him a position at the court of Louis in Naples or at the court of the Grand Seneschal's protector, Caterina of Courtenay.<sup>5</sup> Niccolò finally invited Boccaccio to Naples in 1362 (Léonard, "Boccace et Naples" 75-78; Foresti, "L'egloga ottava" and *Aneddoti* 327 ff.) but, instead of welcoming him in one of his palaces, sent him to "una fetida e abominevole sentina, degna da essere fuggita da' corbi e dagli avoltoi" ("a stinking and abominable hut worthy of being avoided even by crows and vultures" Letter XIII).

An echo of the frustrating experience Boccaccio had in Naples following Niccolò's disappointing invitation can also be found in Letter XXIII (1370?), addressed to the theologian Martino da Signa. Boccaccio introduces his *Eclogues*, specifying that if the names of the characters do not carry any particular meaning, the titles of each eclogue have been "carefully chosen."<sup>6</sup> He does not hesitate to satirize the kingdom of Naples and Acciaiuoli's involvement in the assassination of King Andrew (September 1343), Queen Joan's consort before she married Louis of Taranto. Boccaccio's resentment toward the Grand Seneschal is particularly evident in a 1348 letter, "Quam Pium," to Zanobi da Strada (ed. Auzzas 544-549) and especially in his third and eighth eclogues; they both clearly satirize and allegorize Acciaiuoli. Like the letter to Nelli, Eclogue VIII probably originated from Boccaccio's other disappointing journey to Naples in

1355.<sup>7</sup> Damon encounters Pythias (Boccaccio) in the Neapolitan fields and suggests that Pythias leave, if he does not want to be caught by Midas (the Grand Seneschal), a thief (839 n. 10, ed. Auzzas and Levarie Smarr, *Eclogues* 217).<sup>8</sup> The disappointed Pythias, who regrets abandoning the dry rivers of Florence for the Vesuvius, tries to explain that Midas himself had invited him. The allusion to Acciaiuoli's invitation is clear as is that to his involvement in the assassination of the young king Andrew at the end of the eclogue (cf. Léonard, *Boccace et Naples* 75-78; "L'egloga ottava" and *Aneddoti* 327 ff.). Therefore, while Boccaccio was not indifferent to the drama of the Neapolitan poor, to assert that Letter XIII is either problematic or evinces a sense of the tragic, as Rea claims, goes too far. On the contrary, in two instances, when comparing Neopolitans to beasts with whom he does not want to be associated, Boccaccio is extremely concerned to remind Nelli of his familiarity with the Naples of theatres and banquets: "conobbi dalla mia puerizia costumi de' cortigiani e la vita loro [...] se tu nol sai, amico, io sono vivuto, dalla mia puerizia infino in intera età nutricato, a Napoli ed intra nobili giovani" ("From childhood, I have been familiar with the habits and lifestyle of the courtiers, and, in case you were not aware, my friend, I have lived and been raised, since my early years well into adulthood, in Naples and among young noblemen" XIII, 33-37).

In Letter II (1339), Boccaccio again presents himself as a victim. Here, he wants to recount, probably to his dear friend Petrarch, a vision that he had in Naples when walking by Virgil's tomb. He defines himself and the common people:

Here Cum me igitur vester subditus, ignorantie tenebris involutus, rudis ens, inhers indigestaque moles, informis, sine titulo vivens, cum toto mei curriculo temporis sim Fortune ludibilis conquassatus; meme prorsus miserie palliatus, ad fumos stigios rusticorum, semper respiciens lutum agrestium villicorum, audiendo latratus brunellicos corundem, degustans ligustrica alimenta, odorans fetida que conturbant, tangendo vespres cuiuspiam ruditatis, virgiliana teneret Neapolis

I, your servant, wrapped in the darkness of ignorance, an uncouth being, inert and heavy, shapeless, and living without a title, finding myself for my entire life shaken by the strokes of Fortune, wrapped in misery, always coming and going in a dark labyrinth, in the stygian smoke of uncouth people, the mud of the rustic peasants ever before my eyes, listening to them braying like donkey, feeding myself with grass, smelling odours that disgusted me, touching rough thorns (Boccaccio, *Opere*, ed. Ricci 1064)

One may agree with Rea that the prose in Letter XIII is straightforward compared to the others. In fact, Letter XIII is a merciless representa-

tion of plebeian Naples with which he is clearly familiar. To be sure, Boccaccio was not indifferent to the drama of the poor? note his mention of "la loro vita trista e continua battaglia," ("their wretched sad life and their continuous struggle")?but to conclude that he had any real interest in their problems or any intention of realistically depicting them in order to denounce them is too risky. I would say that such an interpretation betrays Boccaccio's sense of irony, which is, in Auerbach's words, "a type of mediate discourse, indirectly insinuating," and which, as in the *Decameron*, "tends to lower once again his realism to a stylistic level devoid of problems and conflicts" (cf. also Russell Ascoli).

If realism is at stake here, it has to be taken into account that Boccaccio wrote this letter when he was fifty; that is, when he had already explored all the possibilities of realistic representation. His extensive use of irony in Letter XIII is evident in his depiction of the hut and the other people living in his unfortunate Naples lodging. He is simply upset and clearly very resentful toward Niccolò Acciaiuoli.

Rea, however, is not Auerbach. The Neapolitan critic is mainly bothered by the "letteratura dei piagnistei" ("the literature of whining"), as he calls it, and strongly believes that behind those faces, those dripping noses, those livid faces, that unavoidable cough of people the same colour as sweating wax were the Neapolitan slums (cf. Letter XIII 24), Boccaccio already shows "the sentimentality, the sanctimony, the miserable folklore, and natural dirt of people who generate compassion" ("Boccaccio a Napoli" 256). Not that he attributes any trace of sentimentality, pity, or compassion to Boccaccio; Rea does not make the same mistakes as later Neapolitan writers who obscured the truth of the Neapolitan psyche ("Boccaccio a Napoli" 268).<sup>9</sup> Rea obviously idealizes Boccaccio and declares him the champion of a realistic literature of the Neapolitan lower classes that is neither colourful nor connected to folklore.

Rea's reading of Letter XIII attributes his own polemical stand against modern Neapolitan literature to Boccaccio. Rea despises both his contemporaries and their predecessors because they offer their readers a picture-postcard Naples. He ends up writing an essay on Boccaccio in Naples that is, interestingly enough, published with another critical essay on Neapolitan writers, "Il filo perduto" (*Il re e il Lustrascarpe* 418-423), in which he condemns Mastriani, Imbriani, Serao, Di Giacomo, Marotta, De Filippo, indeed all Neapolitan writers except Boccaccio, for their portrayal of lower-class Naples. Why? The answer is in another essay on "I figli": "As long as the 'poor' stories of Naples move one to laughter, their protagonists will remain a miserable lot" (*Il re e il Lustrascarpe*, 50).

Boccaccio is the only one who represents Neapolitans as they are and not as they would like to be. Referring to the tale of Peronella, Rea says:

Boccaccio, pragmatically, rendered a precise portrayal of the Neapolitans according to his practical, mercantilist imagination. He searched for their true cipher beyond their tears, their appearances, and their poverty, which may be just as deceitful as wealth itself. After Boccaccio, anything that was written about the complex world of the soul felt inescapably superficial and resulted in a literary tradition that represented Neapolitans not quite the way they were but the way they would have liked to be. A population that, in order to be recognised as Neapolitan, had to be *Neapolitanised* ( “Boccaccio a Napoli” 269).

Rea blames Di Giacomo for his “*limite signorile*” (aristocratic limitations); that is, his ability to look deeply into people’s hearts, while disdaining “to descend into them and touch the good and the bad, orchestrating them as required by their powerful vulgarity.” In other words, Di Giacomo’s books stroll around Naples without really coming close to its people. The poet, according to Rea, has no pretensions to realistic depiction. He is indifferent to the social conditions of his own people. He represents “their gestures, the facts. . . . in their final phase of comedy and never in the initial phase, which was tremendously tragic” (*Il re e il lustro* 96). The same harsh judgment is reserved for De Filippo, who would help to discover the past of Naples, but not its future, and for the movie directors Vittorio De Sica and Francesco Rosi, the latter for his film *La sfida*.

Returning to the essay on Letter XIII, it becomes evident that what Rea quotes as examples of Boccaccio’s *napoletaneità* (elements that Rea finds in the letter and in some stories of the *Decameron*, namely Peronella in VII, 2 and Andreuccio da Perugia in II, 5) is a transposition to Boccaccio of his own prejudices and parameters in evaluating the Neapolitan people. In the final analysis, Rea seems to recruit Boccaccio for his own battle for the re-evaluation of Naples.<sup>10</sup>

In another essay, “Le due Napoli,” Rea continues to champion Boccaccio’s realism by looking more closely at the tale of Andreuccio da Perugia and continuing his attack against the “limitations” of the most prominent Neapolitan writers:

If we were to indicate a writer who saw Naples in a kind of plastic truth and her people chained to a silent ‘omertà’ of interests, we should read again the story of Andreuccio from Perugia by Boccaccio in his *Decameron*. He wrote the most realistic Neapolitan story of a baffling actuality...There is no sort of picarism at all; on the contrary, Boccaccio

is one the very few writers who could see the people of Naples as real, positive, somehow concrete men in their wickedness, certainly to be preferred to punchinellos or buffoons (*I Racconti* 271-294, esp. 286-287).<sup>11</sup>

Here are the premises on which Rea bases his view of Boccaccio’s realism:

If, by some misfortune, no proof were to have remained of Boccaccio’s stay in Naples and if even history contained no trace of it or, in his books, Naples and its realm were not mentioned, even if all this were buried and obliterated, there would still remain a concrete proof in the world of things and facts that he expressed (“Boccaccio a Napoli” 252).

By this Rea does not refer only to such Neapolitan tales as Andreuccio and Peronella, but to the pillars that support most of Boccaccio’s Neapolitan works. As I mentioned, Rea maintains that Boccaccio’s narrative production is based on an ambivalence that stems from a double life that unfolds on two fronts, sometimes clearly separated, sometimes not.<sup>12</sup> This ambivalence expresses a frustration caused by the clash of reality with dreams and ideals, an opposition that, apparently, is typically Neapolitan. At this point, Rea’s analysis appears especially unconvincing, since the division he offers is too sharp to represent plausibly Boccaccio’s experience: on one side, courtly Naples; on the other, lower-class Naples. It is hard to detect in Boccaccio any real concern for the fate of the Neapolitan lower classes. Remarkable, instead, is his youthful fascination with Robert of Anjou’s court.

The Parthenopeian city remains the space where Boccaccio let the “questioni d’amore” unfold; that is, as in the *Elegy of Fiammetta*, the place of “lietissime feste abbondevole.” The same worldly and hedonistic spirit characterizes the *Teseida*, marking its clear distance from Stazio’s *Tebaide*, as Rita Librandi points out in reference to Arcita and Palemone’s pastimes: “They are knights, but knights of the Angevin Naples” (70). In 1332, Robert tried to ban tournaments because of their violence; the fact that they were still held reveals the persistence of chivalric ideals among the nobility. Tournaments are more a ludic and hedonistic event than violent fights in the style of the Old French epics (Lee 147; Caggese 361; Librandi 60).<sup>13</sup> Unlike Petrarch and King Robert, who condemned the numerous tournaments in Naples, Boccaccio was fascinated by their theatricality. Introducing the tournament between Arcita and Palemone, who fight for Emilia’s love, Teseo defines it as a “palestral gioco.”

If Rea’s analysis of Boccaccio’s experience as a merchant in Naples, developing a realistic style to show sympathy with the destiny and condi-

tions of the lower classes, is unconvincing, his description of Boccaccio's "auditory" experience of the city, although *en passant*, is. Once Boccaccio left Naples, says Rea, he remembered of the city "only the human, visual, auditory part that he felt and fully experienced." Rea is right, since it is in the auditory experience of the polyphonic *vocio* that Boccaccio's Naples, the 'other' Naples, can be found. This polyphony also characterizes Rea's essays and his last novel, *Ninfa Plebea*, which opens with a powerful image:

Il canto era come il vapore di una pentola (pasta e fagioli) che salisse da tutti i cortili. All'inizio, verso il tramonto, fortissimo con voci d'utero-dalle corde di violino alle canne d'organo sfiate - di vecchie e giovani, giovanette e bambine accovacciate fra le gambe delle più grandi, nonne, madri, zie, cugine, amiche e, alla fine, a sera inoltrata, sperduto come un vocio.

Their song was like steam from a pot of boiling pasta e fagioli in all courtyards. At first, toward sunset, it sounded like primitive voices emerging from violin strings and organ canes, sung by old or young women, babies or maids crouched down between the legs of the oldest, their grandmothers, aunties, mothers, cousins, friends. (*Ninfa Plebea* 1)

Throughout the novel, Rea makes different voices mingle. Sometimes other narrators are included: "la vuoi sentire la storia di Catuccio e del barone Airola?" (do you want to hear the story of Catuccio and the baron Airola?), the grandfather asks his niece Miluzza. Catuccio's tale occupies five pages of the novel. This confirms Rea's strong penchant for a choric narration and also his attempt to preserve the oral tradition of the storytelling.

In an essay titled, "Voices," Rea says that the poetry of two of the most representative Neapolitan poets, Di Giacomo and Viviani, "is interwoven with voices" (*Il Re e il lustrascarpe* 152-153). Voices furnish the background for Rea's encounter with Benedetto Croce: "Il balcone era appannato e lasciava filtrare il vocio di Spaccanpoli simile a quello di una gigantesca conchiglia" (*Il Re e il lustrascarpe* 29). How evocative this image is of Spaccanpoli, a quarter of Naples!

Finally, although Sabatini claims that Boccaccio's *napoletaneità* cannot be found in any specific manifestation,<sup>14</sup> I believe that Boccaccio's Naples and the 'other' Naples, the plebeian world, far away from the life of the theatres and the court, can still be found, but not in his realistic representation of the Neapolitan slums, as Rea asserts on the basis of the letter to Nelli and the novella of *Decameron* VII, 2. On the contrary, traces of the 'other' Naples can be identified in the paradigmatic image of the opening of *Ninfa plebea* as Rea himself offers it in the passage already quoted "un

vapore della pentola che sale da tutti i cortile.” The soul of the ‘other’ Naples is in the concert of different voices curious about, or actively involved in, their neighbours’ troubles. Sabatini rightly asserts that Boccaccio’s Neapolitan heritage shows itself in the *Decameron* through the “warm participation”<sup>15</sup> of its characters in a tumultuous reality, but the same can be said of the Neapolitan works as well: *Teseida*, *Filostrato*, *Filocolo*, *Caccia di Diana*.

One scene from the *Teseida* is particularly telling on the role of the compassionate crowd. A scene in Book IX (8-9) is reminiscent, as Limentani says, of an “interno trecentesco o una ‘pietà’” (238). Many Greek women join Emilia and Hippolyta in their grieving. In the same way, on the occasion of a tournament, the citizens and all the lovely ladies arrive and some offer prayers for one or another of the lovers. “Un gran mormorio” (“a loud murmur”; I, 122) rises from several scenes:

nulla persona in Attene rimase,  
giovane, vecchio, zita overo sposa,  
che non corresse là con l’ale spase  
onde venia la coppia gloriosa.  
le vie e’campi e i tetti e le case  
tutt’eran pien di gente letiziosa; ...  
E spesse volte, le prede mirando,  
le guaste veste e i voti destrieri,  
li givan l’uno e l’altro dimostrando,  
dicendo: —Quel fu del tal cavalieri,  
e questo del cotale—;e ammirando,  
le cose state più che volentieri  
recitavan fra lor, ch’avean vedute  
il di, com’eran gite e come sute

There was no person, young or old, maiden or wife, in Athens who did not run there with spread wings as that glorious couple approached. The roads and the fields and the roof tops and the houses were all crowded with jubilant people. Everybody chanted the glory of Arcites and the new bride he brought with him. And many a time, as they observed the booty, the ruined garments, and the riderless horses, they began to point them out to one another and say, ‘they belonged to such and such a knight, and this belonged to so and so.’ As they gazed, they told one another eagerly the events that had taken place and that they had seen them that day, and how things had gone, and what they were like. (*The Book of Theseus* IX, 41-42).

The crowd’s role is central in the *Teseida*, whereas a sense of the chorico remains in the background in Statius (Limentani 240).

Nevertheless, if, for Limentani, those choral scenes remind us of certain paintings of the time? the pilgrimage of the Magi amid throngs of people? the mystery plays, and, in the secular world, the *cantari* tradition, in my opinion, they also convey scenes that Boccaccio would have witnessed daily in Naples, as is clear from the letter he wrote in Neapolitan dialect to Francesco de Bardi (1339) on the occasion of a christening. It faithfully represents the aristocratic/mercantile society in Naples (*Epistole* V, 860).<sup>16</sup> It shows the same tendency toward the visual, light sketch, as Auzzas remarks, the participation of the people in the joyful christening. Each one plays a role: the godfathers offer the best octopus in the market; Ja' Squarcione brings the torch; and more than one hundred girls of the piazza and other, nearby piazze visit the new mother with pearls and gold.

*Caccia di Diana* represents an unusual, but interesting case of the chorico in Boccaccio's Neapolitan works. It very successfully celebrates the noble women of Naples, creating an acoustic experience of the Partenopeian city that Boccaccio would not have found at the court but in the harbour and the streets. If it is true, as Branca points out, that the *Caccia*, like *Il Filocolo* (the prologue and the "Questioni d'amore" in the *Filocolo* Book IV), ideally transposes the habits of Anjou society and "an ideal continuity of inspirational themes" (11),<sup>17</sup> it is also true that a continuity between the two works can be found in a particular type of chorus. In the *Caccia*, the action takes place against a rich background of sounds that are not exclusively human voices: the *Caccia* means getting close to the refined Anjevin society and its habits, but it also means experiencing sounds: hunting horns, noises of wild pigs, branches falling from the trees, barking dogs, and other animals running through the forest. The scene is a typical description of a hunt, but with a speed, a vitality that Boccaccio drew from the 'other' Naples and blends with the classical and romance literary models identified by Branca (5-8). The opening, when "uno spirito gentil volando forte [...] in voce alta gridando" ("a gentle spirit come flying fast, calling" I 7-8) invites the lovely ladies: "donne leggiadre, venite ormai, venite alla gran corte dell'alta idea Diana, che elette v'ha in Partenope per sue consorte" ("Lovely ladies now come to the great court of the high goddess Diana, who has chosen you as her companions in Parthenope" I 9-12) reminds us of vendors in the harbour crying their wares, not to mention the echoing women's voices that Boccaccio must have heard in the *vicoli*, the narrow streets of Naples. The most eloquent scene in this sense is when Diana orders one of them to go up the hill and call, one by one, all the women and girls, and their calls come from afar to their ears, "sì che come agli orecchi di coloro da lunga venne il chiamar di colei, tutte s'apparecchiar

sanza dimoro" ("as her call came from afar to their ears, each one prepared without delay to come down to her quickly" XVI 15).

The *Caccia* is Boccaccio's most musical work, but the chorico, which I intend here as a concerned participation in the vicissitudes of others, expresses itself as *ragionamenti* (conversations). In at least two eloquent scenes in the *Filostrato*, the Trojan women visit first Criseida and then Troiolo:

Ma come noi veggiamo ch'egli avviene,  
 che l'una donna l'altra a visitare  
 ne' casi nuovi va se le vuol bene,  
 così sen vennero molte a dimorare  
 con Criseida tutto il giorno, tutte piene  
 di pietosa allegrezza, ed a contare  
 le cominciarono per ordine il fatto,  
 com'ella era renduta, e con che patto.  
 Diceva l'una:-certo assai mi piace  
 che tu torni al tuo padre e sii con lui. —  
 L'altra diceva- E a me, ma mi spiace  
 vederla dipartir quinci da nui. —  
 L'altra diceva [...]. Questi e molti altri parlar femminili,  
 quasi quivi non fosse, udiva quella  
 senza risponder, tenendoli vili

But as we see it happens that one lady, if she is fond of another lady, goes to visit her when new events affect her, if she wishes her well, so many ladies came to pass the day with Criseida, all full of sympathetic joy, and they began to tell her about the event with its arrangements: how she was being exchanged and on what terms. Said one, 'Certainly it pleases me greatly that you will return to your father and are to be with him.' Another said ... This and much other womanly talk she heard without answering, almost as if she were not there, for she despised it. (*Il Filostrato* IV 80-82).

Following this episode, Boccaccio comments on the "cinguettare invano" (vain chirping) of the women that Criseida cannot stand, just as Troiolo cannot not bear the presence, somehow annoying, of the women in his room:

in poco d'or la sua camera piena  
 di donne fu e di suoni e di canti [...];  
 e molte di lui cognate e parenti raccolte.  
 Ciascuna a suo poter il confortava,  
 e tale il domandava che sentia;  
 esso non rispondea, ma riguardava  
 or l'una o l'altra

In but a little time, the chamber was filled with ladies and music and song ... and many sisters-in-law and female relatives were gathered together. Each one comforted him as far as lay within her power, and someone asked him how he felt (*Filistrato* VII 84)

The choral Neapolitan book par excellence before the *Decameron* is the *Filocolo*. The crowd plays an important role in its crucial episodes. When Biancifiore is condemned to death, the day's events pass from one *ragionamento* to another.

cominciossi per la corte un gran mormorio [...]. Tutti i baroni e l'altra gente, chi in una parte e chi in un'altra ne ragionavano. E altri diceano.... Alcuni diceano ciò non porria essere ... e altri ne ragionavano in altra maniera. E molti ve n'avea che, se non fosse stato per tema di dispiacere al re, avrebbe parlato molto in difesa di Biancifiore [...]. E così d'uno ragionamento in altro il giorno passò.

All the barons and the other folks were talking about it, some in one group and some in another.... And others said ... Others said ... Others argued in a different way ... and there were many who, if they had not feared to displease the king, would have taken up arms if necessary, some for love of her and some for love of Florio. And so between one conversation and another, the day passed. (*Filocolo* II 49, 1-5)

She was surrounded by a vast throng, “niuno era in Marmorina tanto crudele che di tale accidente non piangesse, e l'aere era pieno di dolenti voci” (II, 54, 20; “there was no one in Marmorina so stern as not to weep at this event, and the air was full of sorrowing voices”). When Florio and Biancifiore are both condemned to death, Boccaccio provides us with a delightful sketch of “le vaghe giovani,” other prisoners, who are moved as they watch from the top of the tower the tragic destiny that seems about to befall the young lovers:

... vaghe giovani che pietose, riguardavano dall'alta torre. Le loro lacrime crescono per l'uccisione, e con quelle la loro speranza della salute di Biancifiore: e molte non potendo sostenere di vedere l'uccisione, se ne levano. Altre porgono pietose orazioni agl'iddii per lo salvamento della picciola schiera: altra va e torna, altra alcuna volta non si parte, disiderando di vedere la fine

The tears of the fair maidens who were watching in pity from the meadow increased on account of the killing, and so did their hope of Biancifiore's rescue; and many of them could not bear watching the slaughter but got up. Others offered pious prayers to the gods for the salvation of the little group; some went off but returned, some did not leave at all but wished to see the end (*Filocolo* IV 139, 1-2)

The choric manifests itself everywhere in the *Filocolo*: even when shepherds shelter from the sun under a pine tree that is the metamorphosed Idalagos entertain themselves in *ragionando*, talking about the travails of the two unfortunate lovers Florio and Biancifiore (V 10). A *vocio* whispers constantly throughout the novel; everybody narrates the story of Florio and Biancifiore: the *componitore*, the composer of the work; the characters; Fame; the crowd. Even when no one is recounting Florio and Biancifiore's story, the *ragionare* keeps going (Morosini, "Per difetto rintegrale" and "La morte verbale"). A detail from the illuminated manuscript Can. It. 85 at the Oxford Bodleian Library eloquently shows how the *ragionare* holds an important place in the *Filocolo*: a group of young men are represented "in lieti conversari in the *Filocolo*." Interestingly enough, the same scene is now the cover of the most recent edition of the *Filocolo* (ed. Quaglio 1998).

Everything is discussed in Boccaccio's Neapolitan" works.<sup>18</sup> Sabatini refers to Boccaccio's ability "to gather and to bring the voices of this closed and unknown world to the world of official Italian culture." However, by *voices*, he essentially means the popular songs of Neapolitan girls and remembered in *Rime*, *Amorosa Visione*, and *Decameron*, in the famous episode of Lisabetta from Messina.<sup>19</sup> Without denying Boccaccio's concern with the representation of the oral tradition, as clearly shown in the works mentioned by Sabatini, a contemporary Neapolitan writer, Luciano De Crescenzo, summarizes and epitomizes (are these words different in this context?) the choric and, by analogy, how it functions in Boccaccio's works. In his novel *Così parlò Bellavista*, a man has gone to buy a ball for his nephew, and a thief "mariuolo" steals his car.

... ma che è successo?

Non lo so, io adesso sono venuto

Ma di che si tratta?

Ma se non mi sbaglio pare che hanno preso un mariuolo

No, no, lo stavano prendendo, ma poi quello se n'è scappato. Folla enorme. Un centinaio e forse più di persone si accalca in piazza Mercato davanti a un negozio di giocattoli. Ho fatto tardi e vorrei correre a casa ma la mia natura napoletana si ribella ad andar via senza essere prima informato della 'cosa.' Insomma diciamo così che vorrei almeno sapere di che si tratta. "Ma scusate, sapete che è successo?"

What happened?/ "I don't know. I just arrived"/ "But, what happened?"/ "Excuse me, do you know what happened?" / "If I am not wrong, it seems that they caught a thief." / "No, no, they were going to catch him, but he ran away." / A huge crowd. Hundreds of people or maybe more crowded the piazza Mercato in front of a toy shop. I am late and would like to run home, but my Neapolitan nature is rebelling against the idea

of leaving without first finding out about the “thing.” In other words, let’s say I would like to know at least what it is all about. “Excuse me, do you know what happened?” (*Così parlò Bellavista* 215)

This question is repeated numerous times, and every time somebody new arrives, a “vice-narrator” gives a slightly different version of the facts.

The *Filocolo* exemplifies Boccaccio’s Neapolitan polyphony, reflected in modern times in Rea’s *La Ninja Plebea* and, more ironically, in De Crescenzo. At the close of the *Filocolo*, one remembers not so much the details of the story with its happy ending, but rather the ensemble of voices. Boccaccio’s Neapolitan works are an everlasting polyphony.

In the final analysis, Rea’s study of Boccaccio in Naples offers proof not of Boccaccio’s so-called realism or social consciousness, but of Rea’s own battle against a perception of Naples as “the land of singing” and against the Neapolitan intellectuals, writers, and movie directors who have sympathized with the poor without capturing their tragic sense of life. Rea’s continuous attempt is to discredit the folkloristic and annoying legend of Naples as a “baraccone delle meraviglie” (“cabinet of marvels”). True enough, Boccaccio did not pursue this goal, at least he did not consciously chose to do it.

Rea constantly and vigorously tried to debunk the numerous stereotypes and legends relating to Naples, as all his critical essays show. If he does not prove his point about Boccaccio’s experience of the ‘other’ Naples, he still recognized the importance of the complex polyphony at work in Boccaccio’s Neapolitan writings.<sup>20</sup>

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>In this letter to Martino from Signa (1307?), Boccaccio coldly describes Naples as a “una selva cadente,” a falling forest which is the title of Eclogue V (Levarie Smarr 43-51). Interestingly enough, in the *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta* (II 6), Naples is “joyous, peaceful, abundant, generous,” as opposed to a Florence “full of miserly and envious people.” All the translations from Italian are mine except for Letter XXIII, for which I used Levarie Smarr’s English edition of Boccaccio’s *Eclogues*.

<sup>2</sup>On Boccaccio in’Naples, see also Sabatini; Battaglia 1965; Wilkins; Léonard 1944 and 1954; Bruni; Lee; Branca 1981; Librandi; De Blasi and Varvaro; Padoan; Rea, “Boccaccio a Napoli” 252-74; Kirkham 2001.

<sup>3</sup>Rea (“Boccaccio a Napoli” 262) also believes that, in Naples, “Boccaccio acquired the vast tragic sense of life, of a life in movement, without scruples, spent by and in action, without compromises, intense in both good and bad, in both profane and celestial love.”

<sup>4</sup>In Letter XIII, Boccaccio states that he has been twice cheated and disappointed by Niccolò (“due volte da queste promesse ingannato”), but it is not clear in which year he received the first invitation from Acciaiuoli, probably in 1355 judging from Eclogue VIII and Petrarch’s Letter *Fam.* 15. For more on Boccaccio and the years he visited Naples and Acciaiuoli, see Sabbadini; Falco; Léonard (all his works) and Morosini, “Boccaccio and the Mediterranean legend,” Spring 2003 and the entry on “Niccolò Acciaiuoli” with an updated bibliography in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*.

<sup>5</sup>See Letter V, “Niccola se a’ miseri,” written to Acciaiuoli 28 August 1341, a few months after Niccolò returned to Naples from an expedition to Greece. Like the *Ameto* and *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta*, it shows how unhappy Boccaccio was in Florence (“dell’ essere mio in Firenze contra piacere niente vi scrivo, però che più tosto con lagrime che con inchiostro sarebbe da dimostrare”) and his expectations from the Grand Seneschal; cf. also Auzzas, *Epistole e Lettere*, 542-543.

<sup>6</sup>“Et ob id, cum desideres tam titolorum quam etiam nominum colloquentium in eelogis meis sensum, nolo mireris, magister optime, si absque significato nonnulla colloquentium nomina comperies: de titulis non sic, omnes enim accurate apposui,” writes Boccaccio, in Eclogue XXIII. More on Boccaccio’s *Eclogues* in Levarie Smarr, “Boccaccio pastorale tra Dante e Petrarca” 237-254.

<sup>7</sup>For further inquiries into the debate concerning the complex chronology of this eclogue, see Foresti, *Aneddoti* 399-400; Léonard, *Boccace et Naples* 75-78; Hauvette, 159 ff. and my n. 8.

<sup>8</sup>Andrew of Hungary was the consort of the young Queen Joan the First. He was the youngest son of the King of Hungary, and his murder brought about the Hungarian invasion of Naples in 1347-1348. Cf. “Niccolò Acciaiuoli”, Cachey and Baransky, eds., *Dictionary*. About the Eclogues, it must be said that in two of them, the fifth and sixth, Boccaccio praised King Louis of Taranto. In Eclogue VI, Boccaccio was still hoping to be invited to Naples in 1348, when the king and queen returned, and he celebrates Acciaiuoli’s achievements (see Léonard, *Boccace et Naples* 34-44).

<sup>9</sup>In another critical essay dedicated to “Mastriani romanziere” (*Il re e il lus-trascarpe* 47-48), Rea tends to be openly polemical toward his predecessors Eduardo De Filippo, Salvatore Di Giacomo, and Matilde Serao. To a certain extent, he respects Mastriani, “who would have been the first Neapolitan novelist (because there is yet to be one), while now he must content himself with being the muddled author of a muddled world;” in the same vein, Rea writes very critically an essay on Mastriani, Serao, Di Giacomo and De Filippo in “Le due Napoli” (*I Racconti* 275-296). More on Rea and the other Neapolitan writers on Morosini, “A ‘plebeian nymph’ in Naples.”

<sup>10</sup>In “Un mare diffamato” (*Il re e il lustrascarpe* 218) Rea says that “Naples must be considered a modern city. Its reduction to the land of singing, beautiful moons, beautiful sun, appears to us insulting and offensive.”

<sup>11</sup>Pulcinella is a Neapolitan mask, originating in the region of Campania, that looks like a cockerel. It is worn in the role of a stupid servant.

<sup>12</sup>Rea (“Boccaccio a Napoli” 270) says that Boccaccio has “one foot in the world of the upper classes and the other foot, along with his a good part of his torso, in the world of merchants, brokers, speculators, customs officers, with the common people that the courtly milieu and the Angevin world, a superhuman world, ignores.”

<sup>13</sup>Lee (147 n. 23) rightly claims that, during Robert’s reign, “tournaments do not have the aggressiveness that used to characterize them and now have become an occasion for entertainment with a theatrical component that merely exemplifies group activities and how a certain aristocracy organizes its free time.”

<sup>14</sup>According to Sabatini (*Napoli Angioina* 110), napoletaneità can be seen “in the dominant consideration Boccaccio gives to women, first of all, as readers, as narrators, and also as protagonists in his tales or in the large presence of courtly and ‘sublime’ themes, either by their milieu or by the high tragedy of the sentiments, such as delicate and violent passions and magnificent actions, which Boccaccio attributes to great figures of southern history.”

<sup>15</sup>Sabatini (*Napoli Angioina* 111) claims that “the Neapolitan heritage manifests itself also in the sense of warm participation in a tumultuous and adventurous reality that constitutes the subject matter of the tales which are not by chance set in southern lands and on its open seas.”

<sup>16</sup>On this letter, see also Monti 226; Niccolini 5-12; Sabatini, “Prospettive sul parlato nella storia linguistica italiana (con una lettura dell’*epistola napoletana* del Boccaccio)” 434-466.

<sup>17</sup>One may also think of course of the Florentine works as well: the *Decamerone* but also the *Corbaccio*. Here the need to comment on what has happened to other people, leads the protagonist to meet with “una compagnia assai utile, colla quale, primieramente cominciammo a ragionare con ordine assai discreto” *Corbaccio* 473).

<sup>18</sup>Sabatini (*Napoli Angioina* 112), cites *Rime*, *Sonetti* IV, V, VI, LXV; *Amorosa visione*, XLI, 10 ff., 58 ff.; and *Fiammetta* V 27.

<sup>19</sup>See Rea’s colorful essay on Neapolitan street vendors’ voices, “Voci,” *Il re e il lustrascarpe*, 152-156.

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ISABELLA BERTOLETTI

PETRARCH'S *RERUM VULGARIUM FRAGMENTA*:  
MOURNING LAURA

Petrarch is now chiefly celebrated as the author of Italian poetry, of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*. While he was still living, however, he wrote most copiously in Latin as a way of safeguarding his name with posterity. With his unfinished epic poem in Latin, *Africa*, on the theme of the second Punic war, he earned the crown of poet laureate in a solemn ceremony held in Rome in 1341. Time's inexorable ticking and its power to obliterate horrified Petrarch, both personally and professionally. At a difficult juncture in the history of the Italian vernacular, while Italy was not politically or linguistically unified, the poet was troubled by the susceptibility of his Italian poems to being distorted by common readers. He repeatedly swore indifference toward the vernacular compositions.<sup>1</sup> In private, however, the poems secretly received Petrarch's continuing attention until his last days; in fact, he was still in the process of renumbering the last thirty poems of the collection when he died.

Significantly, there is very little mention of Laura in Petrarch's extensive Latin writings and no mention of her in the oration delivered by the poet on the occasion of his highest professional achievement, his coronation as poet laureate in Rome, where he alluded, instead, to the mythological story of Apollo's consecration of the laurels as a result of his pursuit of a nymph who assumes arboreal form in a metamorphosis effected to escape his possession, as the paradigm of the poet's pursuit of his laurels. His *Fragmenta*, seemingly composed out of compulsion to redress his most immediate longings for Laura, tell a multi-faceted story rather than focusing exclusively on an elusive woman. With them Petrarch exposes the most intimate nuances of his illegitimate passion for her (and of his moral crisis), insisting on the uniqueness of his predicament, yet he was prudent to include in the collection multiple poems on entirely different subjects (politics and friendships, for instance), poems which would illustrate how the vernacular functions in the real world and not just in matters of the heart.

In sonnet 90 Petrarch describes his beloved in flight: her blond hair is scattered and knotted by the wind: "Erano i capei d'oro a l'aura sparsi / che

’n mille dolci nodi gli avolgea.” (“Her golden hair was loosed to the breeze, which turned it in a / thousand sweet knots.”)[(90. 1-2)]<sup>2</sup> Fleetingly, words attain the unimaginable: they make time stand still and arrest Laura’s escape.<sup>3</sup> This vision, more than any other, crystallizes the poet’s immoderate love and the ephemeral woman who inspires it. This image, furthermore, suggests the paradox of Petrarch’s lyrical project in its entirety. Laura’s hair, at times flowing in the wind, at times knotted by it, provides the link between the defining themes of the text and its formal logic. Petrarch’s *Fragmenta*, to some extent, seem to be the spontaneous expression of an unbridled passion, yet they are meticulously collected and ordered. As soon as the *Fragmenta* allow Petrarch to enjoy momentary release from his relentless obsession, they also renew the emotions that they should redress.

Laura’s image throughout the *Fragmenta* is that of a different order of being, a flickering apparition with attributes rather than features. Her shimmering figure comes in and out of focus and her full description, the poet would have us believe, transcends his rhetorical competence (“manca l’ardir, l’ingegno et l’arte”—“there fails my daring, my wit, and my art” [309. 14]). Thus Petrarch relies on the enumeration of a limited number of formalized discrete physical attributes that he reiterates hypnotically, attributes which never come together into a portrait.<sup>4</sup> Petrarch sprinkles the fragments of Laura’s body throughout his scattered rhymes as radiant focal points: her “bella ignuda mano” (“beautiful naked hand” [200.1]), “bel giovenil petto” (“lovely youthful breast” [37.102]), “begli occhi” and “bel guardo sereno” (“beautiful eyes” and “lovely clear gaze” [37. 74 & 83]), “piedi” (“feet” [292. 2]) and, of course, “chiome d’or” (“locks of fine gold” [159. 6]).<sup>5</sup> Her ephemeral presence can be surmised, obliquely, through faint traces like the imprint of her foot (“et del bel piede alcun vestigio serbe”—“and keep some print of her lovely foot,” [162. 4]) or an abandoned glove (“candido leggiadretto et caro guanto,”—“White, light, and dear glove” [199. 9]).<sup>6</sup> It is equally impossible to pin down Laura’s personality given the narrow range of expression granted her by the poet. She laughs (“dolce ride”—“sweetly laughs” [159. 14]), sometimes she sings like a siren (“quel celeste cantare che mi disface”—“that heavenly singing which so melts me”[220. 10]).<sup>7</sup> Petrarch tells us that she speaks (her “dolce parlare”—“sweet speech,” [205. 3] and “l’accorte parole”—“skilful words,” [37. 86]), that her words command reverence and were instrumental in his *innamoramento* (“fanno altrui tremar di meraviglia”—“make one tremble with wonder” [200. 12]), but we have negligible access to the content of her utterances. It is the poet who recollects her words (“voi diceste allora”—

“you said then” [87. 9]), or imagines what she meant to say when he encountered her (“parea dir”—“she seemed to say” [33. 13]; “ne la fronte a Madonna avrei ben letto”—“on my lady’s brow I might have read” [331. 52]). Paradoxically, Laura grows increasingly available after she dies, when she appears in the poet’s dreams (“in sonno” [250. 1]).<sup>8</sup> Laura taunts Petrarch with the frustration of empty embraces (“Beato in sogno, e di languir contento,/ d’abbracciar l’ombre e seguir l’aura estiva,”—“blessed in sleep and satisfied to languish, to embrace shadows,/ and to pursue the summer breeze,” [212, 1-2]);<sup>9</sup> her physical unavailability drives Petrarch into a state of emotional paralysis, and yet she is the indispensable motivation of a poetic corpus which will earn him the laurel and circulation among generations of readers.

The key question to address is not what the *Rime sparse* are about, but rather what position they individually adopt on the fluidity of perception that they depict with so much virtuosity. At the outset of the *Fragmenta* the reader is faced with the identity of a poetic compilation that announces itself as split: the collection bears a Latin title (*Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*) and a vernacular body (presumably the contrast between a classical and unchanging language and a new and impermanent one would underscore the fragmentation of the following poems).<sup>10</sup> The opening sonnet confirms the complicated nature of Petrarch’s project. In spite of its introductory capacity, it does not firmly situate the poet:

Voi ch’ascoltate in rime sparse il suono  
di quei sospiri ond’io nudriva il core  
in sul mio primo giovenile errore,  
quand’era in parte altr’uom da quel ch’i’ sono: (1. 1-4)

You who hear in scattered rhymes the sound of those sighs  
with which I nourished my heart during my first youthful error,  
when I was in part another man from what I am now.

Sonnet 1 introduces a subject whose attitude of repentance is incomplete, an incoherent self, besieged by an inner conflict who swings between lucidity and emotion, encapsulated in the utterances “piango” and “ragiono.” These are emotions at odds with one another that require the poet to admit to his psychic disintegration and rhetorical meltdown (“di me medesmo meco mi vergogno”—“I am ashamed of myself within”). And yet, seemingly, Petrarch inaugurated his lyrical sequence with this sonnet in order to suggest that identity should be undivided, static and finished. Petrarch teases the reader with the phantom of a conversion which would give a strong sense of direction to his text and structure its content in a

manner comparable to the use of a vanishing point for organizing spatial perspective. By postponing his conversion, the signifying horizon of his lyrical collection vanishes giving way to its multiplicity and points of dispersal.

In an unpersuasive palinodic move the poet, like Guido da Montefeltro in Dante's *Inferno*,<sup>11</sup> entertains the fallacious position of recanting a crime (yet undisclosed) and looking for absolution before sinning. It is, in fact, only in sonnet 2 that Petrarch confesses his offense, his "errore," and then proceeds to reiterate it throughout the scattered rhymes. The recantatory mood of sonnet 1 (*recantare* indeed comprises etymologically both the element of renunciation and repetition), is literalized by the reiteration of the "giovenile errore." Petrarch presents a curious double version of his *innamoramento* in sonnets 2 and 3:

Per fare una leggiadra sua vendetta  
e punire un di ben mille offese,  
celatamente Amor l'arco riprese,  
come uom ch'a nocer luogo e tempo aspetta.

Era la mia vertute al cor ristretta  
per far ivi e ne gli occhi sue difese,  
quando 'l colpo mortal là giù discese,  
ove solea spuntarsi ognì saetta; (2. 1-8)

To take a graceful revenge and to punish in one day a thousand offenses, Love took up his bow again secretly, like a man who waits for the time and place to hurt.

My vital power was concentrated in my heart, to make there and in my eyes his defense, when the fatal blow fell where every previous arrow had been blunted;

Era il giorno ch'al sol si scoloraro  
per la pietà del suo fattore i rai  
quando i' fui preso, et non me ne guardai,  
che i be' vostr' occhi, Donna, mi legaro.

Tempo non mi parea da far riparo  
contr'a colpi d'Amor; però m'andai  
secur, senza sospetto; onde i miei guai  
nel commune dolor s'incominciaro. (3. 1-8)

It was the day when the sun's rays turned pale with grief for his Maker when I was taken, and I did not defend myself against it, for your lovely eyes, Lady, bound me.

It did not seem to me a time for being on guard against Love's blows; therefore I went confident and without fear, so my misfortunes began in the midst of the universal woe.

Literal and syntactical echoes (“Era [...]quando”) call attention to the fact that one poem reproduces (though reflected by a distorting mirror) the other. The presentation of the initial Ovidian scene of wounding in sonnet 2 is accommodated to a Christian setting when sonnet 3 uncovers the liturgical occasion (Good Friday) that rendered the poet unarmed and thereby brings the drama of the Fall to bear on his amorous experience.<sup>12</sup> In this way Petrarch brings forth to bear two major, though eclectic, intertexts: profane and sacred, Ovid and the Bible; he sacrilegiously intersects incompatible versions of the same events.<sup>13</sup> By evoking the figure of the Passion and examining his private suffering against the redemptive suffering of Christ, he implicitly compares his wounds as an unrequited lover to the wounds of Christ on the cross. Suffering is advanced as the condition for writing and his poetry, pouring out of a torn subject, seems almost to hemorrhage from his wounds.<sup>14</sup>

As the sequence unfolds, the poet’s world, dimmed by the eclipse brought about by Christ’s passion in sonnet 3, is illuminated and enlivened by the woman who is born in sonnet 4, who becomes his new, personal sun, yet one connected to Christ by the irreverent comparison of human birth to the mystery of the incarnation (4. 9-14).<sup>15</sup> This initial sequence hardly equips the reader with enough elements to construct a romantic plot. With its allusions to physical death (in sonnets 2 and 3), however, Petrarch reminds his readers that beginnings and epilogues tend to be one and the same in habitual narratives of conversion. In poem 5 the sequence culminates with the simultaneous naming and scattering of the woman (who has thus remained unidentified): “LAUDando” (5. 3); “Real” (5. 5); “Taci” (5. 7); “LAUDare et Reverire” (5. 9); “morTAL” (5. 14). “Laureta” is clearly not vulnerable to the arrows of love (she is not wounded by them), she invades every facet of the poet’s universe but in the form of graphic signs, a pure signifier composed and decomposed at the poet’s will. The final syllable of her name, in the poem’s final line, coincides with the poet’s last breath and her death (“il fin”). The poet, who now chooses to identify with Apollo (the Sun), secularizes the spectacle of Christ’s crucifixion (when the sun was reverently concealed) and displaces it with the audacity of his professional endeavour. It is Laura, not the mystery of the incarnation, who exceeds his grasp and requires stronger shoulders (the “omeri,” which reverently allude to Petrarch’s ideal mentor, Homer).

The poet’s mental image of Laura is the sensual basis of a love that Petrarch is unable to sublimate into a symbolic occasion for elevation. Intermittently penitent, Petrarch recognizes the danger of a desire that has caused his own spiritual degeneration into a fragmented being. In his most directly personal work, the scathingly introspective *De secretu conflictu*

*curarum mearum*,<sup>16</sup> Petrarch undertakes a prolonged attempt at spiritual healing. During a three-day dialogue between himself and his spiritual mentor, St. Augustine, he searches his soul and portrays his secular and spiritual aspirations competing in a struggle that endures into a lingering conflict rather than ending in conversion. In the *Fragmenta*, analogously, he correlates his long and painful pursuit of Laura to a continuous struggle which fails to produce a definitive religious epiphany. Against the lofty background of Augustinian orthodoxy it is Laura who merits the applause of the Saint, while Petrarch can bring himself only to confess his failure in relation to his simultaneous commitments to a view of agency (and authorship) as resolved, coherent and self continuous. Laura's unwavering virtue ("Contra autem illa propositi tenax et semper una permansit"—"She always held firm and true to herself" [p. 222]),<sup>17</sup> draws attention to the spiritual fragmentation of the poet and reminds us of his shortcomings.

The implacably personal tale of Petrarch's amorous afflictions (suggestively designated by Augustinus in the *Secretum* as a plague, "tuam pestis" [p. 224]), unfolds against the background of a real epidemic breakout, the Black Death, which swept through Europe twice during Petrarch's life (in 1348 and again in 1361) with devastating consequences and was for all survivors an overwhelming reminder of the uncertainty of life.<sup>18</sup> Petrarch's *Familiares*,<sup>19</sup> an immense epistolary corpus addressed to real and imagined recipients that Petrarch organized and revised with zeal equal to that which went into his vernacular poems, is replete with instances where he confesses his vulnerability to the emotional horrors of the catastrophic event and admits his despair. The dedicatory letter brings his response to the tragedies of epidemic loss to the forefront and thus locates his introspective writing within a large, historical perspective:

Ecce, iam fere omnia tentavimus, at nusquam reques...Tempora, ut aiunt, inter digitos effluxerunt; spes nostre veteres cum amicis sepulte sunt. Millesimus trecentesimus quadragesimus octavus annus est, qui nos solos atque inopes fecit. (*Familiares*, 1. 1)

I have attempted almost everything and I have found peace nowhere...Time, it is said, slipped through my fingers; my old hopes are buried with my friends. The year 1348 has left me alone and in despair.

In Petrarch's *Rime* the death of Laura occurs during an outbreak of the great epidemic of 1348.<sup>20</sup> The death of Laura and Petrarch's *innamoramento*, in fact, are the two single events of the *Fragmenta* presented with chronological certainty. This is a striking deviation from the habitual ambiguity of the temporal framework of the *Fragmenta*.

Mille trecento ventisette, a punto  
su l'ora prima, il dì sesto d'aprile,  
nel laberinto intrai, né veggio ond'escà. (211. 12-14)

One thousand three hundred twenty-seven, exactly at the first hour of the sixth day of April, I entered the labyrinth, nor do I see where I may get out of it.

“Sai che 'n mille trecento quarantotto,  
il dì sesto d'aprile, in l'ora prima  
del corpo uscio quell'anima beata.” (336. 12-14)

“You know that in 1348,, on the sixth day of April, at the first hour, that blessed soul left the body.”

Petrarch's love blossoms at a specific point in his life and is suddenly (and prematurely) affected by the woman's death, which strikes at another unique moment. Petrarch's lyrical collection is condemned to exist in time, haunted by this stunning, almost insolent coincidence: Laura's death occurs on an anniversary of the day in which the poet first saw her, a symmetry blatantly advertised by Petrarch's identical presentation of the two dates in the final *terzine* of sonnets 211 and 336. It is no accident that the date of the poet's entry into the labyrinth of love (his spiritual death) and Laura's physical death are coordinated. What is more, the poet has fallen in love on Good Friday (the *feria sexta aprilis*), thus his personal tribulations shape up against the larger framework of Christ's crucifixion.<sup>21</sup> Petrarch relies on the loaded symbolic potential implicit in the *feria sexta aprilis* to construct the moral fabric that underlies the whole collection of the *Fragmenta*. Since the collection is punctuated with fifteen poems commemorating his first encounter with Laura (which later converges with her death, 30, 50, 62, 79, 101, 107, 118, 122, 145, 212, 221, 266, 271, 278, 364, ranging from 1334 to 1358), each anniversary is a reminder of Laura's enduring hold over Petrarch's life. Whether Laura is dead or alive, the poet's perception of time is dangerously scanned in relation to her.

Even when she is alive, however, Laura seems dead, and mourning the essential ingredient to formulate a poetics which identifies in human frailty the stimulus behind human endeavours. When Petrarch depicts Laura at her most glorious, as in the frozen erotic tableaux presented in sonnet 90, he has to concede to the unyielding beat of time, aptly rendered by the reiteration of the word “or” (“ch'or ne son sì scarsi”—“which are now so stingy of it” [90. 4]; “et se non fosse or tale”—“and if she were not such now” [90. 13]). Laura's shimmering golden hair, scattered and knotted by the wind, her luminous eyes, her bearing, her voice, belong to a previous

time and state of being in the same way Petrarch's fragmented self is always linked to its past and imagined through metaphors of loss and desire.

In a letter addressed to Phillip, Bishop of Cavaillon (*Familiares* 24.1) Petrarch expressly equates writing (and reading) with death:

Continue morimur, ego dum hec scribo, tu dum leges, alii dum audient dumque non audient; ego quoque dum hec leges morirar, tu moreris dum hec scribo, ambo morimur, omnes morimur, semper morimur, numquam vivimus dum his sumus... (p. 1245)

We die continuously: myself while I am writing, you, while you are reading, others while they are listening (or not listening) to me. As you will be reading this letter, I will be dying, you are dying while I am writing to you, the two of us are dying, we are all dying, we are always dying, we are never living while we are here...

In the *Fragmenta* Petrarch uses metaphors reminiscent of Laura every time he describes the inescapable ticking of time, since his days move swifter than a deer ("I dì miei più leggier che nessuno cervo/fuggir come ombra"—"My days swifter than any deer, have fled like a shadow" [319.1]), time flies and beguiles him ("O tempo, O ciel volubil che fuggendo/inganni i ciechi et miseri mortali"—"O time, O revolving heavens that fleeing deceive us blind/ and wretched mortals." [355.1-2]), death is around the corner ("et sì come la vita/fugge et la Morte n'è sovra le spalle."—"see how time flies and life flees, and how Death /is at our backs." [128.98-99]). The transitory nature of time is punctuated by the dizzying rate of metamorphoses in canzone 23. This composition is reassessed by its companion poem, 323, as the end of the collection approaches, which depicts the demise of things known to be immortal and erects a poignantly enduring monument to impermanence. Death looms large over the *Fragmenta*, casting a huge shadow which introduces and propels the narrative forward towards its fulfillment, marking the relentless passage from frailty to silence, eternity, and disintegration in poem 366.

In a desperate attempt to relieve the anxiety provoked by the inexorable and unrepeatable events with which life is saturated—it has already brought Laura and will invariably usher the poet (and his work) to a state of oblivion—Petrarch looks for solutions to contain his dispersion and steady his course. Augustinus admonishes him, in the *Secretum*, that he renounce earthly (thus impermanent) pursuits. The Saint, thus, discredits the secular, courtly rationalizations adopted by Franciscus to justify himself, when he maintains that his love for Laura should become a path to salvation. Augustinus clearly spells out the incompatibility of the poet's infat-

uation for Laura (the creature) and his claims of devotion towards the Creator: “Ab amore celestium elongavit animum et a Creatore ad creaturam desiderium inclinavit”— “[She] strayed your soul from heavenly love and substituted your love for a creature for your love for the Creator.” (p. 216). The poet, at times, is painfully conscious of the action he must take in order to correct his mistakes. In the envoy of a powerfully penitential *sestina* “A la dolce ombra de le belle frondi” (142), echoing the idolatrous “Giovane donna sotto un verde lauro” (30) with palinodic intentions, he explicitly lays out his path to redemption from the idolatrous desires explored in the former poem:

Altr’amor, altre frondi, et altro lume,  
altro salir al ciel per altri poggii  
cerco (ché n’è ben tempo) et altri rami. (142. 37-39)

Another love, other leaves, and another light,  
another climbing to Heaven by other hills  
I seek (for it is indeed time), and other branches.

The insistence on the word “altro” reminds us of Augustine’s words in the *Secretum*, where the saint describes his conversion: “transformatus sum in alterum Augustinum,”— “I became transformed in another Augustine,” (p. 114). Petrarch is aware of his moral obligation to replace his double object of desire Laura/lauro with the “altri rami” of the tree/cross of Christ. The intermittently penitential moments in the *Rime* reiterate this view: “cosa bella e mortal passa e non dura”— “this beautiful mortal thing passes and does not endure” (248.8); “Ché mortal cosa amar con tanta fede/ quanta a Dio sol per debito convensi,/più si disdice a chi più pregio brama.”— “For the more one desires honor, the more one is forbidden to/love a mortal thing with the faith that belongs to God alone.” (264.99-101).<sup>22</sup> Throughout the *Fragmenta*, in fact, Petrarch displays a keen awareness of his moral situation. This knowledge, however, does not inspire a radical and permanent change. Petrarch candidly confesses his weakness in the concluding line of a poem that echoes the *Secretum* and, just like the prose dialogue, closes with a failed conversion: “et veggio ’l meglio, et al peggior m’appiglio.”— “and I see the better but I lay hold on the worse.” (264.136). Petrarch’s lack of resolution is underscored by the strategy displayed in the organization of his lyrical sequence. In fact, merely three poems after invoking the “altri rami,” he places a sinful poem that concludes with the statement: “sarò qual fui, vivrò com’io son visso”— “still I shall be what I/have been, shall live as I have lived” (145.13).

Petrarch thus remains transfixed by Laura's beauty and attempts to steady his course by disguising his transformation into a stone (and a questionable fulfillment of his family name) as a type of conversion. Under Laura's Medusa-like ability he turns into stone ("l' volto di Medusa,/che facea marmo diventar la gente."—"the face of Medusa, which made people become marble." [179.10-11]; "et que belli occhi che i cor fanno smalti,"—"and those lovely eyes that turn hearts into stone" [213.9]).<sup>23</sup> He otherwise attempts to secure the evanescent goal of his desires by solidifying Laura into an object of religious worship. In either case, unwilling, or unable, to give up his investment in a mortal object, he accommodates his sinful predicament to a monumentalization of his passion. His sin, primarily, is not that of having strayed from religion for a worldly passion, but that of having made his love into a religion.<sup>24</sup>

The poet openly admits to his propensity to commit the sin of idolatry by comparing his adoration of Laura to an old pilgrim's veneration of the *Veronica* in St. Peter's—the cloth carrying the imprint of Christ's image at the time when he was walking on Golgotha to be crucified. (16.9-14)<sup>25</sup> Petrarch's presentation of the *Veronica* raises crucial questions on Petrarch's spiritual claims and opens his poetry, which conveys them, to charges of moral perversion. The significance of the cloth is predicated upon the simultaneous belief in the truth of an incarnate God and in the belief that His visage is reproduced, perfectly, upon the cloth. Petrarch daringly employs the reliquary for poetic effect by inverting its legitimate claims: Christ figures as mere metaphor or image ("sembianza") while Laura has become a type of Christ ("forma vera").<sup>26</sup> Petrarch's desire to experience and enjoy the visible (Laura), furthermore, supersedes his duty to extrapolate the narrative of the crucifixion from the *Veronica*, in a fashion that is reminiscent of the *Rime*'s gathering of scattered fragments, on the requisite of organizing scattered stains into a plot that bespeaks a dramatic event.

Laura, momentarily collected into visions of static monumentality and transcendental perfection, often becomes an ornate reliquary: "vedi quan-t'arte dora e 'mperla e 'mostra/ l'abito eletto e mai non visto altrove," ("see how much skill has gilded and impearled and incarnadined/ that noble body never seen elsewhere," [192.5-7]), "Muri eran d'alabastro e 'l tetto d'oro,/ d'avorio uscio, et fenestre di zaffiro" ("The walls were of alabaster and the roof of gold, the entrance/ of ivory and the windows of sapphire," [325.16-17]). She is also transformed into a jewelled cross: "duro lauro/ ch'a i rami di diamante et d'or le chiome." ("harsh laurel/ that has branches of diamond and golden locks." [30.23-24]), decorated with "topaci" ("topaz" [30. 37]),<sup>27</sup> revered by the poet as a shrine "l'adoro e 'nchino come cosa santa" ("I adore it and bow to it as to a/ holy thing," [228.14]).

This language is powerfully reminiscent of an astonishing letter to Giovanni Colonna (*Familiares* [1.4]) where Petrarch relates an anecdote implicating the emperor Charlemagne in a case of necrophilia. Charlemagne is hopelessly infatuated with a woman. He shamelessly overlooks both his imperial and his private duties, so much so that his public image is ruined and his own spiritual salvation jeopardized. When the woman suddenly dies everybody celebrates the emperor's deliverance from disgrace. The emperor, however, secretly refuses to accept the inevitable and embalms the woman. He then carries on ghastly trysts with her dead body which is described with a language that is openly reminiscent of Laura's idolatrous metamorphoses. Charlemagne clads his defunct lover with purple cloths and covers her with jewels:

cuius nec morte lenitus furor, sed ipsum obscenum cadaver et exangue translatus est, quod balsamo et aromatibus conditum, honustum gemmis et velatum purpura diebus ac noctibus tam miserabili quam cupidio fovebat amplexu. (p. 261)

whose obsession did not diminish with her death, it intensified over the dirty and bloodless corpse; after having had it embalmed and covered in gems and dressed in purple, he would embrace it night and day in abject and passionate fits of passion.

Petrarch extrapolates from this episode a general illustration about the enslaving power of love (certainly one suitable to his enamored condition). In the *Rime*, though, he acknowledges his inability to disassociate himself from the mundane force of love and concedes that his devotion is enduring, constant, and all consuming even after Laura's death. While he remains silent about his own longings to possess a dead female body, absolutely passive, fixed and available, he openly identifies with Orpheus, the poet/musician, on a loving quest for his dead wife Euridyce:

Or avess'io un sì pietoso stile  
che Laura mia potesse torre a Morte  
come Euridice Orpheo sua senza rime,  
ch'i' vivrei anchor più che mai lieto!<sup>128</sup> (332.49-52)

Would I had so sorrowful a style  
that I could win my Laura back from Death  
as Orpheus won his Euridyce without rhymes,  
for then I would live more glad than ever!

This unusual tribute to the power of poetry is understandable, since Petrarch is engaged in a prolonged (and unsuccessful) campaign to sway an

unresponsive woman. Furthermore, his readers are invited into his lyrical sequence as a sympathetic audience (the term “pietà” reverberates throughout the collection). Most urgently, Petrarch is invested in gaining mastery over the disordering force of death. The representation of death and containment of its devastating effects is central to the *Fragmenta*, to Petrarch’s poetic project, and is no less challenging than Orpheus’s undertaking. Death, like Laura, is a signifier of absence that incessantly recedes towards an unreachable signified.

In the last poem, 366, while professing to close wounds and tantalizing the reader with completion (the last word of the collection is “pace”), Petrarch recasts old themes: Christ’s flesh dripping innocent blood for the atonement of the guilty becomes the product of the old poetic oxymoron (“virginità feconda”- “fruitful virginity” [366. 58]). The poet, who has blasphemously displaced the wounds of Christ on the cross with his own gaping body and transformed Christ into a figure for his erotic torment,<sup>29</sup> is forever subjected to the woman who has crucified him (“con saldi chiodi fisso” ‘nailed there firmly’ [45. 9]) on the mirror where her narcissistic desires begin and end (“veggendo in voi finir vostro desio;” - “seeing your desire ended in yourself.” [46.11]). Her lethal arms (“belle e crude braccia/ che m’ancidono a torto,”—“lovely, cruel arms that/ unjustly kill me,” [171.1-3]) have replaced the outstretched arms of Christ, sacrificed on the cross to save humanity (“Quelle pietose braccia/in ch’io mi fido veggio aperte ancora;”-“Those/ merciful arms in which I trust I see still open;” [264. 14-15]).<sup>30</sup>

The wounded human body with its exposed orifices remains incomplete, impure, open to view and becomes the model for the organization of the text, with its dual beginnings, partial recantations, inconsistencies, a text, furthermore, that is traversed by seven puzzling blank pages, left by Petrarch (like an open sore) between poem 263 and 264. The text, seemingly unfinished, arrives to its readers in its pure materiality as a dismembered corpus, entrusted with a story which can fall apart as soon as it is assembled.

Staking his claim to life eternal, Petrarch evades the narrative replication of his earlier, spiritual death through sin, the effects of eros on his identity, and, at the same time, he eludes his secular undoing by the literal binding and unbinding of a disseminated manuscript. In order to fulfill an aberrant fantasy and transcend his post lapsarian sexual and mortal body (the sight of putrefaction, decay and corporeal incompleteness) Petrarch tenders his limbs to public viewing, turning himself into a poetic spectacle (like Christ and Laura), and makes a reliquary of the woman who has caused his agony. In the way in which the saintly bodies (or fragments

thereof) revered in shrines will be restored to eternal wholeness and harmony in Paradise, the idol of Laura is the vehicle whereby the poet's own dismembered body and the extension of his self into a fragmented extracorporeal existence (the *Fragmenta*) will be collected in the "real" world beyond, as a vehicle of his future worldly *fama* and his secular salvation.<sup>31</sup>

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>An eloquent example of Petrarch's denunciations of his vernacular poetry (designated as *nugae* or *nugellae*) is in a letter addressed to Boccaccio (*Seniles* XVII, 3), where he declares that his vernacular texts do not merit serious attention.

<sup>2</sup>All references to Petrarch's poetry are from Giovanni Ponte, ed. *Francesco Petrarca. Rime sparse*. (Milano: Mursia, 1978); the source of all translations is Robert M. Durling ed. and transl., *Petrarch's Lyric Poems* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1976). I will refer to the lyrical collection as *Fragmenta* (from the Latin title given by Petrarch, *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*) or as *Rime sparse* (from the first verse of sonnet 1). All further references to the *Rime sparse* will be included in the text with poem and line number.

<sup>3</sup>This image is endlessly rehearsed in the *Fragmenta* as the source the poet's passionate condition. See, for instance 127, 83-85; 143, 9-1; 159, 5-6.

<sup>4</sup>For discussions of Laura's description in the *Rime* in terms of Petrarch's poetics of fragmentation and idolatry/fetishism see Nancy Vickers "Remembering Dante: Petrarch's 'Chiare fresche et dolci acque'." *MLN* 96 (1981): 1-11; Robert Durling "Petrarch's 'Giovane donna sotto un verde Lauro.'" *MLN* 86 (1971): 1-20; John Freccero "The Fig Tree and the Laurel: Petrarch's Poetics," *Diacritics* 5 (1975): 34-40; Giuseppe Mazzotta, "The *Canzoniere* and the Language of the Self," *Studies in Philology* 75 (1978): 271-296. On the monumental influence of *Petrarchismo* in defining the standard of female beauty in the visual arts, see Elizabeth Cropper "On Beautiful Women, Parmigianino, *Petrarchismo* and the Vernacular Style." *Art Bulletin* 18:3 (1976): 374-394.

<sup>5</sup>For the most developed example of Laura's description, see *canzone* 127 (especially ll. 49; 57-65; 77-78); for good examples of Laura's features, see 291; 49; 348. Sara Sturm-Maddox reviews the distinguishing elements of the physical description of Laura as well as her confined repertoire of actions. "Petrarch's Siren: 'Dolce Parlar' and 'dolce canto' in the *Rime sparse*." *Italian Quarterly* 103 (1986): 5-19.

<sup>6</sup>For a reading of Laura's absence, see Robert Pogue Harrison, "The Death of Beatrice and the Petrarchan alternative," in *The Body of Beatrice*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1988): 93-109. John Freccero "The Fig Tree" 39 postulates that in the void created by the lady's absence he elevates the verse to the level of love surrogate when the laurel crown replaces Laura's favors as the motive for poetic cre-

ation. The Petrarchan lyric, according to Mazzotta, suffers a loss of referential function and becomes an exercise in poetic self-objectification, “The *Canzoniere* and the Language of the self”. 285-291.

<sup>7</sup>Sturm-Maddox, “Petrarch’s Siren,” 5. <sup>8</sup>For instances of her post mortem utterances, see poems 279, 302, 341, 342, 226, 359. In 359 and 362, she offers the poet assurance that she is waiting for him in Paradise.

<sup>9</sup>This is a recurrent image in Virgil’s *Aeneid*, where Aeneas fruitlessly attempts to embrace his mother (Book 1) and the ghosts of his wife (Book 2) and his father (Books 5, 6). See Elizabeth Belfiore, “‘*Tar frustra comptensa*’ Embraces in the *Aeneid*.” *Phoenix* 38:1 (March 1984): 19-30.

<sup>10</sup>Modern editors still shy away from the original title and adopt, instead, *Canzoniere* (which is in Italian and endows the collection with a stronger sense of wholeness). Gianfranco Contini’s edition uses *Canzoniere* (Torino: Einaudi, 1964); Piero Cudini’s edition (Milano: Garzanti, 1976) follows the example of Contini; Guido Bezzola titles the collection *Rime* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1976), Giovanni Ponte (Milano: Mursia, 1979), Robert Durling use *Rime sparse*, a title more suggestive of the scattered nature of the poems.

<sup>11</sup>Guido da Montefeltro’s episode appears in Canto 27 of Dante’s *Inferno*. See T. Barolini, “The Making of a Lyric Sequence: Time and Narrative in Petrarch’s *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*.” *MLN* 104 (1989): 30.

<sup>12</sup>For the parallels between 2 and 3 see Marco Santagata “Connessioni intertestuali nel *Canzoniere* del Petrarca,” *Strumenti critici* 9 (1975): 89. For 3 and 62 see Dennis Dutschke “The Anniversary Poems in Petrarch’s *Canzoniere*,” *Italica* 58 (1981): 88. Sara Sturm-Maddox discusses the “cosmic disturbances associated with the death of Christ” presented in 3. *Petrarch’s Metamorphoses: Text and Subtext in the “Rime sparse”* (Columbia: U. of Missouri Press, 1985) 111.

<sup>13</sup>Throughout the *Fragmenta*, in fact, Petrarch cultivates the unpredictable association of dissimilar literary fragments. He borrows, for instance, from the *Aeneid* and the *Metamorphoses* in his portrait of Laura: her flowing hair and elusive demeanor strikingly evoke Virgil’s Venus (when she materializes, disguised as a huntress, to assist her son Aeneas and departs, hastily, as he is about to recognize her) and Ovid’s Daphne (narrowly escaping Apollo’s rapacious attentions as she becomes transformed into a laurel). On the Ovidian subtext see Peter Hainsworth. *Petrarch the Poet* (London, 1988) and his “The Myth of Daphne in the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*” *Italian Studies* 34 (1979): 36; Sara Sturm Maddox. *Petrarch’s Metamorphoses: Text and Subtext in the ‘Rime sparse.’* (Columbia: U of Missouri, 1985) esp. ch 2.; Thomas M. Greene *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry*. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1982) 111. The *Aeneid* and *Metamorphoses* rehearse the myth of the origin of Rome but support diametrically antithetical attitudes towards it.. On Ovid’s revision of Virgil, see Daniel Javitch: “The *Orlando Furioso* and Ovid’s Revision of the *Aeneid*.” *MLN* 5 (1984): 1023-1035.

<sup>14</sup>The Greek term *pathos*, rendered by Cicero as *perturbatio animi* and by

Seneca with *affectus* begins, at least with Ambrose to be designated as *passio* and merges with the meaning of *passio* as condition of subjugation to an external power (for instance, in Augustine's *Confession* IX, 4 and VIII, 5 & 10, where it is viewed as degeneration and perversion. See: Remo Bodei, *Ordo amoris* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1991) 76-77.

<sup>15</sup>Poem 4 is discussed by Thomas P. Roche *Petrarch and the English Sonnet Sequence* (NY: AMS Press, 1989), 22-25; for a discussion of the role of the sun see Peter Hainsworth, *The Languages of Literature in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford and NY: Clarendon Press, 1988), 6.

<sup>16</sup>All quotations are from Francesco Petrarca *Secretum* ed. Enrico Fenzi (Milano: Mursia, 1992). I will include all page numbers in the main text. All translations are my own. Petrarch's assiduous frequentation of biblical texts and of the works of Augustine is well documented. Carlo Calcaterra *Nella selva del Petrarca* (Bologna: Editore Licinio Cappella, 1942) presents a useful discussion of Augustine's influence on Petrarch ("Sant'Agostino nelle opere di Dante e Petrarca") and argues that the influence of the saint went beyond the *Secretum*; Adelia Noferi *L'esperienza poetica del Petrarca* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1962), 55-66; 253-284 offers a suggestive correlation of the lyrical poetry and *Secretum*; N. Iliescu *Il Canzoniere petrarchesco e Sant'Agostino* (Roma, 1962) and M. Santagata *I frammenti dell'anima. Storia e racconto nel "Canzoniere" del Petrarca* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992) place the *Rime* at the center of the literary project that inspires dialogue.

<sup>17</sup>For examples in the *Fragmenta* of Laura's sternness, see poems 260 where her excellence is deemed to surpass that of all the heroines of antiquity, 261, where she is the example of "senno, valor, cortesia," and 263 an apotheosis of her honor.

<sup>18</sup>For a general depiction of the obsession of all medieval people with the brevity of life and omnipresence of death, see Philippe Ariès, *Storia della morte in Occidente dal Medioevo ai giorni nostri* tr. Simona Vigezzi (Milano: Rizzoli, 1978): esp. 44, 92, 94. See also Umberto Bosco, *Francesco Petrarca*. (Bari: Laterza, 1968), 23-63.

<sup>19</sup>Quotations from the *Familiares* are in Francesco Petrarca *Opere* (Firenze: Sansoni Editore, 1975). All translations are mine.

<sup>20</sup>Giovanni Boccaccio's descriptions of the effects of the plague on Florentine society in his *Decameron* are illuminating. For the gloom and pessimism, as well as obsession with death, which followed the outbreak of this catastrophe epidemic, see Millard Meiss, *Painting in Florence and Siena after the Black Death* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1951).

<sup>21</sup>Sara Sturm-Maddox discusses the "cosmic disturbances associated with the death of Christ" presented in 3, *Petrarch's Metamorphoses: Text and Subtext in the "Rime sparse"* (Columbia: U. of Missouri Press, 1985), 111. For a discussion of the symbolic meaning of the *Feria sexta aprilis* in terms of Petrarch's personal mythology see B. Martinelli, "Feria sexta aprilis: la data sacra nel *Canzoniere* del Petrarca." *Petrarca e il Ventoso* (Bergamo: Minerva Italica, 1977), 103-148 and Carlo Calcaterra, *Nella selva del Petrarca* (Bologna: Cappella, 1942), 225-228.

<sup>22</sup>On the opposition of cupidity and charity, see D.W. Robertson, Jr. "The Doctrine of Charity in Medieval Literary Gardens: A Topical Approach Through Symbolism and Allegory." *Speculum* 26.1 (1951): 24-49.

<sup>23</sup>See K. Foster "Beatrice or Medusa," *Italian Studies Presented to E. R. Vincent* ed. C.P. Brand, K. Foster U. Limentani. 48

<sup>24</sup>For a comprehensive recapitulation of the anniversary poems see Thomas Roche, "The Calendrical Structure of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*." *Studies in Philology* 71 (1974): 152-172. See Robert M. Durling's seminal discussion of *sestina* 30 in "Petrarch's 'Giovane donna sotto un verde lauro.'" *MLN* 86 (1971): 1-20. Teodolinda Barolini discusses this anniversary poems in "The Making of the Lyric Sequence: Time and Narrative in Petrarch's *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*." *MLN* 104 (1989): 20.

<sup>25</sup>Courtly love, according to D. W. Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 99 is essentially idolatrous in nature.

<sup>26</sup>For a discussion of the real and the figural and the rhetoric of the body exemplified by the Veronica, see Louis Marin "The Figurability of the Visual: The Veronica or the Question of the Portrait at Port-Royal." *New Literary History* (1991), 22: 281-296 and Georges Didi-Huberman "The Index of the Absent Wound (Monograph on a Stain) *October* 29 (1984): 63-81.

<sup>27</sup>For a discussion of this image see John Freccero, "The Fig Tree and the Laurel: Petrarch's Poetics." *Diacritics* 5 (1975): 5. The jewelled cross has also eschatological significance. In his article on poem 30, Durling points out that the New Jerusalem is described in Apocalypse 21 as being "decorated with 12 kinds of precious stones, including topaz." See "Petrarch's 'Giovane donna'" 13. Also, see Robert M. Durling *The Figure of the Poet in Renaissance Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard U. P., 1965) 247 for a discussion of the rhetorical figure of the *adunaton*, so often employed by Petrarch in his poetry, in terms of its apocalyptic implications.

<sup>28</sup>For an exploration of the theme of necrophilia through various literary figures, see E. Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1992). On Ovid and Virgil's treatment of Orpheus see Charles Segal, *Orpheus: The Myth of the Poet*. (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins, 1989): esp 1-94.

<sup>29</sup>Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) offers a brilliant and provocative reading of Renaissance representations of Christ, the centrality of the mystery of the Incarnation and cultural repression of Christ's sexuality. For Christ to redeem humanity by his death he had to be thoroughly man in every aspect, thus the insistence with which artists represented his genitalia (which he connects to the debates about his circumcision).

<sup>30</sup>In the Incarnation God takes on a body to save humanity he thus institutes the sacrality of the ordinary human body in its fragile physiology. The night before the violent destruction of his flesh Christ designates the ontological presence of his body in its manifestation as the Eucharist. The Eucharistic body and the resur-

rected body, each of them incorruptible, underwrite the ontological alliance of body and soul and the exclusion of the flesh, which is understood to fill out the body imprecisely. Petrarch, unable to disengage from his earthly love and appropriates the terminology of Christianity for his own cult of Laura and for his audience's reverence of the *Fragmenta*.

<sup>31</sup>For a complete study of the theological debates in Petrarch's age about reliquaries, see: Carolyn Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*. (NY: Columbia UP, 1995). On the sociopolitical significance of the body and on the centrality of the body in the Middle Ages, seen as a period in which incarnational aesthetics governed (thus not a purely metaphysical period) see Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination* trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988): 83-106, Peter Brown *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*. (NY: Columbia UP, 1988).

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PATRIZIA GUIDA

## ADA NEGRI: UNA SCRITTRICE FASCISTA?

L'adesione degli intellettuali al regime fascista è difficilmente semplificabile nella nota dicotomia fascismo-antifascismo in quanto essa si è stratificata lungo una gamma che va dalla consonanza entusiastica ad un'adesione vissuta su basi idealistiche, da un assenso ipocrita ad un'adesione comunque critica verso certi aspetti della politica fascista, da un'adesione formale e superficiale all'opposizione dissimulata. Da parte sua la dirigenza fascista aveva messo in atto una politica culturale tesa a mobilitare gli intellettuali sia sul piano ideologico, inserendoli nel grande processo di rinnovamento e modernizzazione del Paese, sia sul piano strutturale, offrendo loro opportunità di lavoro e di carriera. Ed, infatti, anche gli storici più "assolutori" hanno dovuto riconoscere che, almeno fino agli anni Trenta, il Fascismo operò tra il consenso di gran parte degli intellettuali.

Come molti intellettuali del suo tempo anche Ada Negri accolse con entusiasmo l'avvento del Fascismo, che reputava l'erede naturale dei postulati del primo Socialismo in grado di risarcire il popolo dalle illusioni del sistema liberale. Lo storico U. Guglielmotti spiega l'adesione della Negri al Fascismo come una scelta inevitabile:

Non poteva non salutare l'aurora di una nuova epoca, dove la giustizia avrebbe avuto il sopravvento sulla iniquità e sulla miseria, senza bisogno di alzare barricate, di distruggere ricchezze utili a tutto e di spargere sangue fraterno<sup>1</sup>.

La lettura dell'epistolario Negri-Mussolini consente di precisare meglio la natura del rapporto della scrittrice lodigiana con il regime fascista non tanto quale scelta programmatica di tipo politico-ideologico, quanto piuttosto quale scelta "sentimentale" dovuta all'amicizia che la legava al Mussolini socialista<sup>2</sup>. Un'amicizia sicuramente ricambiata dal Duce anche in considerazione del fatto che tutta la macchina propagandistica fascista che operava per il consenso necessitava di figure pubbliche di richiamo, come Ada Negri, la quale, con il suo passato socialista, rappresentava quasi una conferma dei proponimenti della dirigenza fascista<sup>3</sup>. La Negri, infat-

ti, aveva conosciuto Mussolini al tempo in cui questi dirigeva « *Il Popolo d'Italia* »<sup>4</sup>, l'organo di stampa socialista, e ne rimase amica fedele almeno fino al 1942, come documentano le lettere ora disponibili. Per comprensibili ragioni di politica editoriale questa amicizia fu opportunamente censurata nell'immediato dopoguerra dai curatori dell'*Opera omnia* negriana (Milano, 1947). Nel volume *Poesie*, alla poesia “Per la morte di un giovane” fu, infatti, depennato il sottotitolo che recitava “In memoria di Sandro Mussolini”; mentre il racconto “Libro di Sandro” di *Erba sul sagrato* fu completamente eliminato. L'epistolario Negri-Mussolini, in effetti, lascia intravedere un rapporto fatto di reciproca stima e di solidarietà che non venne mai meno neppure in concomitanza di eventi gravi, come ad esempio l'omicidio del parlamentare socialista Giacomo Matteotti, quando la scrittrice, come aveva fatto Pirandello, si premurò di ribadire la sua fedeltà al Duce

Eccellenza e Amico mio,  
in questo momento, ch'è certo il più doloroso della vostra vita, permettetemi di dirvi una parola di devozione, di fiducia, di fedeltà.  
Illimitata è la fede che i buoni italiani hanno in Voi: illimitata la certezza che Voi saprete, a costo di tutto, purificare l'ambiente, e usare del ferro chirurgico sino in fondo.  
Siete stato tradito; ma siete infinitamente più forte del tradimento e dei traditori. Forte perché puro. E invitto, sempre.  
Io null'altro posso fare che pregar Dio, per l'Italia e per Voi.  
Prego.  
La vostra devota serva  
Ada Negri<sup>5</sup>

Le lettere della Negri al Duce mantengono tutte lo stesso tono di devozione e di apprezzamento per la sua attività politica. Si legga, per esempio, il biglietto scritto in occasione della consacrazione di Pascoli a « Poeta Nazionale »

So che di salute state meglio: ogni giorno leggo prove del grandissimo coraggio che con l'opera indefessa opponete al male; e sempre più vi amo e vi amo, e umilmente e silenziosamente prego per Voi.

Alalà!...  
Vostra devotamente  
Ada Negri<sup>6</sup>

Oppure la lettera del '27:

In silenzio e in umiltà, ma con animo fedelissimo, seguo il meraviglioso sforzo di Vostra Eccellenza verso la meta di un'Italia sempre più rispettata. Nulla domando alla vita, per me: ma domando a Dio di proteggere Vostra Eccellenza, con lo stesso ardore devoto e fervente che m'illuminò il giorno in cui Vi salutai, Primo Ministro d'Italia e suo Duce, subito dopo la marcia su Roma.

Di Vostra Eccellenza devotissima Amica<sup>7</sup>

Le lettere della scrittrice al “Duce che ha miracolosamente condotta l’Italia a tanta saldezza e potenza” si concludono sempre con espressioni di reverenza (“Devotissimamente”, “con devota fedeltà”, “prego per Voi; Amico mio, con tutta l’anima. Di V.E. umilissima”, “la fedelissima della vigilia e di sempre”, “Sentitemi sempre, umilmente ma fedelmente oltre ogni prova, vicina”) fino alle ultime missive del 1942:

Dio Vi accompagni, Duce: pensate a me come ad una silenziosa amica che Vi sta sempre spiritualmente accanto senza abbandonar-Vi un minuto<sup>8</sup>.

Lo stesso epistolario svela, tuttavia, l’ipoteca utilitaristica che comprensibilmente gravava sul rapporto: a cominciare dalle azioni volte alla valorizzazione della scrittrice sia in Italia che in Europa, che si concretizzarono con il conferimento di numerosi premi, come il Premio Mussolini<sup>9</sup>, il premio conferitole dal Comune di Milano<sup>10</sup>, il premio Firenze<sup>11</sup>, il conferimento della medaglia d’oro alla poesia<sup>12</sup>, fino alla nomina ad Accademico d’Italia<sup>13</sup> che doveva ripagarla del mancato Nobel<sup>14</sup>; dalla supplica per la scarcerazione dell’amica Nella Giacomelli<sup>15</sup>, alla proposta del testo unico di Stato per la III classe elementare curato da A. Negri<sup>16</sup>, ai contributi in denaro<sup>17</sup>. Da parte sua, la scrittrice era consapevole del peso che l’amicizia di Mussolini poteva avere sulla sua fortuna editoriale come testimoniano alcune lettere, nelle quali l’editore Mondadori chiedeva l’autorizzazione ad utilizzare le parole del Duce per pubblicizzare i volumi della Negri<sup>18</sup>. Una lettera, in particolare, esemplifica l’aspetto strumentale del rapporto:

L’autorità del Vostro giudizio mi farà un gran bene, in un periodo nel quale la giovine poesia e la giovine critica mostrano di compatirmi o addirittura di ignorarmi. Dopo il Premio Mussolini a « Vespertina », il premio Firenze al « Dono » (che di Vespertina ebbe un successo anche maggiore) e il conferimento della Medaglia d’Oro alla mia poesia, concessomi da S.E. Giuseppe Bottai, dietro vostro consenso altissimo, vi sono antologie letterarie novissime che mi escludono per la poesia come

per la prosa; e un giornale che si chiama « Il regime fascista » di Cremona pubblica, l'undici corrente, la stroncatura velenosa della mia opera completa. I diritti della critica li ho sempre rispettati, ma c'è un limite. E quell'ignobile stroncatura promette di continuare in altro numero. Io domando al Duce d'Italia: È giusto che un poeta il quale ha ricevuto riconoscimenti nazionali e del Governo sia in un giornale militante trattato così?<sup>19</sup>

La scrittrice faceva riferimento all'articolo di Biondolillo, nel quale il critico attaccava ferocemente tutta la poesia della Negri, la cui seconda parte, annunciata, non fu mai pubblicata<sup>20</sup>.

Tutto ciò se, da una parte, toglie ogni dubbio sul rapporto della scrittrice con il regime fascista, dall'altra, non aiuta a chiarire la fisionomia della scrittrice quale *scrittrice fascista*. Perché Ada Negri non fu una *scrittrice fascista*, se per scrittrice fascista intendiamo quegli scrittori i quali coi loro scritti avevano sostenuto la politica del regime o avevano cooperato al generare il consenso popolare verso il regime. Indubbiamente agli occhi della gente comune e nelle intenzioni della dirigenza fascista Ada Negri doveva rappresentare una sorta di malleveria spirituale nei confronti del regime, così come accadeva con Pirandello ed altri scrittori noti dell'epoca. Ma sarebbe arbitrario cercare nessi sociologici tra l'opera negriana, soprattutto quella degli anni Trenta e Quaranta, e gli avvenimenti politico-economici dell'epoca, anche in considerazione del fatto che la narrativa negriana subì proprio in quegli anni una radicale mutazione imboccando nella sua linea più vitale una direzione di ricerca esistenziale, etica e metafisica. Tale mutazione si realizzava attraverso una produzione introspettiva, nella ricerca di un'alternativa esistenziale o spirituale alla difficile realtà esterna, una ricerca ora confidente ora disperata di realizzazione nell'interiorità della coscienza o negli spazi metafisici, spesso nell'esperienza religiosa in senso proprio. La scrittrice parve, dunque, rifugiarsi nella letteratura come un campo di esperienza alternativo a quello della cultura di regime: le professioni di inettitudine a vivere, le rappresentazioni di amare vicende esistenziali e le descrizioni paesaggistiche costituivano, di fatto, un contraltare al trionfalismo degli intellettuali e dei mass media fascisti. Tuttavia, in ambito poetico, alcune liriche sembrano fare eccezione in quanto furono composte in concomitanza di eventi pubblici, quali la giornata della fede oppure la giornata della maternità. La famosa lirica «L'anello d'acciaio», pubblicata sul *Corriere della sera* proprio in occasione della «giornata della fede», è stata spesso interpretata dagli storici come espressione di sostegno alla politica fascista da parte della poetessa. Se, però, si considera il contesto storico-politico in cui la lirica fu concepita si intuisce che essa fu il frutto

del risentimento per l'applicazione delle sanzioni economiche volute dalla Società delle Nazioni, che tutto il popolo italiano subì come un'ingiustizia e che lo indusse a stringersi intorno al governo fascista<sup>21</sup>.

O Madre Italia, io mai t'ebbi sì cara  
 com'oggi: mai fosti per me sì ricca  
 di meraviglie, come oggi che, porti  
 all'anulare un infrangibil cerchio  
 d'acciaio, e non hai gemme oltre quel cerchio  
 d'acciaio, anello di superbe nozze.

A te lo cinge il popolo, nel giorno  
 del vento avverso, dell'ingiusta e cruda  
 ma non temuta povertà. Con l'oro  
 l'ottenne delle fedi che alle mani  
 delle tue donne amor commise, se in pio  
 rito innanzi all'altare. Le tue donne  
 Italia: dalla Grande Incoronata  
 all'umile che d'erba s'inghirlanda:  
 e non fu sorda alla campana.  
 Tutto in quell'oro: anima e carne, sangue  
 di vena, latte di mammella, pianto  
 versato, amore amato, fiamma e brace  
 santa del focolare: per l'anello  
 d'acciaio offerto alla tua gloria tutto.  
 Dall'anular non lo toglier mai<sup>22</sup>

Ad eccezione di queste rare composizioni d'occasione, a partire da *Di giorno in giorno* (1932) la prosa negriana, dunque, si arricchisce di ricordi personali, di impressioni, di descrizioni cui si intrecciano momenti di riflessione nella forma conchiusa del bozzetto o del frammento.

Anche la presenza di alcuni *topoi* fascisti (l'archetipo della donna "moglie e madre esemplare" e il mito della maternità) è legata al fatto che questi temi trovano origine nella elezione di un sistema di valori e canoni appartenenti di fatto alla società tardo-ottocentesca e quindi preesistenti al Fascismo, da questo storicamente recuperati e fatti propri. A titolo di esempio basti analizzare la posizione ambigua di Ada Negri nei confronti della questione femminile: se, da una parte, il proletariato femminile è protagonista dei suoi romanzi e/o racconti e alla scrittrice va sicuramente il merito di aver sollevato il velo sulle condizioni miserabili delle donne lavoratrici dell'età giolittiana, d'altra parte, proprio la rappresentazione della condizione femminile, lascia trasparire la posizione antifemminista della scrit-

trice, posizione che risultava più conservatrice di quella della dirigenza fascista, che accanto alla promozione dell'archetipo “moglie e madre esemplare” aveva avviato una politica economica e sindacale a difesa delle lavoratrici moderna e per certi versi innovatrice<sup>23</sup>. L'atteggiamento della Negri, conseguenza di un mode-ratismo aperto alle ragioni dei più deboli anche se deliberato a non condurre la difesa di quelle ragioni sul piano di radicalismo integrale<sup>24</sup>, si concretizzava nella costruzione di personaggi i quali, nonostante l'insostenibilità della loro condizione, raramente violano le leggi della natura o tentano di sovvertire il corso assegnato al proprio destino<sup>25</sup>. Le rare trasgressioni naufragano, riportando alla situazione *ex ante*, oppure sono punite dalla società o da Dio. In altri termini, l'agnizione delle differenze sociali è assimilata dai personaggi negrianiani soltanto per renderli consapevoli dell'ineluttabilità della propria condizione di emarginati. Non eroine ma, al contrario, quindi, donne vittime di sé stesse e della società, a cominciare dalle protagoniste di *Le solitarie* (Milano 1917). B. Merry nota correttamente che la Negri “condemns some of the external and visible signs of progress and improvements in the condition of women. The thin typists trotting off to their offices in tight dresses and stocking earn the writer's sarcasm in several incidental episodes.”<sup>26</sup> Si osservi, infatti, il tono a metà strada tra il paternalismo e il sarcasmo con cui descrive le sartine nelle parole della protagonista:

Le aveva amate come figlie; ma non eran più le sue figlie. Già dai primi mesi della guerra, assenti i padri, assenti i fratelli e i fidanzati, sole a guidarsi, sole a guadagnare, non avevan tardato ad approfittare d'una libertà senza controlli. Le mamme, poverette, a casa, coi piccoli. (332)<sup>27</sup>

Certo, i tempi eran mutati. Non si poteva impedire ai sindacati operai d'imporre le nuove paghe, di difendere le otto ore, d'ostacolare i licenziamenti. Giustissimo: sacrosanto: a fin di bene: non tutti i padroni le somigliavano. Né si poteva impedire alle ragazze d'ossigenarsi i capelli a guisa di vecchie cocottes, e d'ossigenarsi anche l'anima, che si spezzava e s'inaridiva come i capelli. Né agli scioperi e alle dimostrazione di far chiudere ogni tanto i negozi: che non si poteva più comprare un rocchetto di filo, e il mondo pareva morto. (334)

Ogni dubbio circa la posizione ideologica della Negri in merito alla condizione femminile è fugato, ancora una volta, dalle lettere pubblicate postume, in cui emerge prepotentemente una forma di antifemminismo che è soprattutto mancanza di solidarietà nei confronti delle donne che cercano di emanciparsi da una situazione di disagio materiale e spirituale<sup>28</sup>.

Anche l'altro *topos* negriano della maternità è sbrigativamente interpretato come postulato fascista. In realtà il mito della maternità nella Negri, oltre a essere cronologicamente antecedente alla famosa campagna demo-grafica del Duce, si fonda su basi diversissime. Per la Negri la maternità non è associabile né alla riproduzione della razza, né alla grande nazione italica. La maternità è un evento fisico e spirituale, misterioso, e per questo fatalmente legata all'esperienza della morte della donna o del bambino ("Il suo diritto", "Il sonno", "Niobe", "Gelosia", "Gli orfani", "Marcella", "Il prematuro")<sup>29</sup>. Inoltre, la maternità è interiorizzata dalla scrittrice come veicolo di autosignificazione della soggettività femminile, che consente di stabilire una relazione tra esistenza e coscienza:

l'avevo messa al mondo io, quella creatura: le avevo dato un corpo sano e perfetto, perché potesse un giorno essere sposa, aver figli, allattare, vivere santamente la sua vita di donna, al pari di tutte le donne benedette da Dio (306)

era nata per essere la mamma di Jacopo (316)

una donna è sempre una donna: con un grembo da far figli mammelle per allattare (578)

Ella non capiva, né rispondeva. Gli squassi e gemiti dei quali riempiva la sua notte eran, sì, di tormento: ma anche di vittoria inconsapevole. Era femmina, che importa se cieca? Era femmina e partoriva. (361)

Le donne in cui destino è di essere madri (il più bello, il più giusto destino, sia pure nel dolore) danno al mondo creature che loro rassomigliano, e nelle quali continuano a vivere. (140)

Ma è soprattutto sul piano dello stile che la prosa negriana si allontana dai canoni fascisti. Già a partire dalla raccolta *Le strade* la pagina negriana mostra un affinamento tecnico, la vena poetica perde l'irruenza dei primi anni acquistando limpidezza e trasparenza progressiva, e appare sfrondata dalle zeppe retoriche che caratterizzavano lo stile dei primi racconti. La trama presenta una parabola narrativa che diventa sempre meno conclusa nei racconti della maturità, dove la narrazione si fa più vicina al modello dell'*elzeviro* e del *bozzetto*. Inoltre, la collocazione nella terza pagina dei quotidiani dove questi brevi racconti inizialmente apparvero per poi essere raccolti in volume certamente impone la rinuncia alla centralità della trama nel suo svolgimento logico-cronologico a favore dell'episodio, della singola scena, di una dimensione cioè, corrispondente allo spazio concesso dalle tre colonne del giornale. È alla luce di queste sollecitazioni che devono essere valutate le novelle in cui è più ridotta la funzione della trama e più moderna la peculiarità del racconto.

Le prime novelle negriane presentano una struttura della frase di corto respiro, con proposizioni poco estese e un'articolazione lineare, in alcuni casi addirittura elementare, contraddistinta da una rilevante uniformità:

S'era alzata alle cinque, prima dell'alba: aveva aperto il portone, scopato le scale e l'atrio, rimesso in ordine il suo bugigattolo, lucidate le maniglie d'ottone, ricevuta e distribuita la posta; e preparato il caffé-latte per sé e pel bambino, che aveva sempre fame: che, appena sveglio, apriva il becco come gli uccelli di nido. S'erano, come al solito, impacciate e smarrite un poco, le sue mani lente di sessantenne, nell'infilare i vestiti al diavoletto che le sgusciava fra le dita, serpantino, una vera anguilla, nell'allacciargli i bottoni — e ne mancava sempre qualcuno. Ma il piccino era adorabile, di carni sode e candide, di cuore allegro e pieno d'amore per la sua nonna. Non parlava mai, neppure per isbaglio — guidato dall'infallibile istinto che è la sapienza dei bambini — della madre, fuggita tre mesi avanti con un operaio di vent'anni più vecchio di lei (dove i due si fossero rifugiati nessuno sapeva): sempre, invece, teneramente, del babbo, da un anno in trincea, sul Carso. (81)

Si nota la volontà della scrittrice di trascurare i legami esplicativi abbandonandosi alla sensibilità intuitiva del lettore. La riduzione delle congiunzioni produce frasi strutturalmente disgiunte, nelle quali i predicati verbali sono sostituiti da elementi nominali. La profusione di sostantivi apposizionali si spiega appunto come scelta funzionale per riequilibrare l'assenza dei mezzi di congiuntura,

C'è negli altri, che sospirano dietro Vittoria-terremoto: sempre allegra: piena di coraggio: pronta alla più dolorosa medicazione come al più gaio conversare: occhio furbo, cuore leggero, riso spumeggiante, balzati vivi vivi da una commedia del Goldoni. (273)

Nel passo citato la struttura della frase è frantumata in piccole unità attraverso l'uso di sintagmi apposizionali paratattici basati sull'elencazione di tratti caratteristici che, in questo caso, sono in relazione con il personaggio. Questa predilezione per la frase leggera è perfettamente allineata alla nuova estetica nel campo del linguaggio della prosa, che insiste sulle descrizioni e sull'aumento degli indizi contenutistici che costruiscono un profilo umano o una figurazione di oggetti. Ciò conduce ad un incremento del numero dei sostantivi, sistematici paratatticamente, senza legame sintattico particolare e ad un forte ridimensionamento della ipotassi e delle relative di secondo grado perché la scrittrice in definitiva vuole descrivere molto più che raccontare. Il ricorso alla prosa d'arte, rilevante soprattutto nelle opere della maturità, è segno di un'ulteriore tensione verso una calibratura del linguaggio che tende ad adeguarsi ai dettami del momento.

Nel quadro di una evoluzione della narrativa negriana con specifico riferimento alla narrativa, queste raccolte rappresentano uno spartiacque tra la produzione giovanile e quella matura. La scrittura raffinata di questi anni rivela l'ambizione della scrittrice di ottenere il consenso anche di quelle élite intellettuali che non avevano apprezzato le sue liriche. La frammentazione della frase si intensifica con una punteggiatura atipica (i due punti sostituiscono spessissimo la semplice virgola) che smembra l'articolarsi del periodo, ponendo tutti i sintagmi sullo stesso piano e azzerando ogni gerarchia narrativa. Qui il costrutto si infittisce, i segni di punteggiatura assecondano e rivelano le intenzioni musicali del periodo e la tensione mimetica del ritmo, prima assenti, come nel seguente brano:

Sono stelle umane: sono macchine-stelle, guidate da uomini. Camminano, parallele, da un vuoto verso un altro vuoto: il palpito ritmico del loro passaggio quasi non si avverte di qui: nelle tenebre, è dato l'inganno delle distanze, la loro altezza pare vicina a quella delle vere costellazioni. Le raggiungono: le rasentano: se ne staccano, seguendo una traiettoria fissa, che non ammette ostacoli. Ora s'impigliano nella Via Lattea: se ne liberano: ne sono già lontane. Dovranno pur sorpassare il carro dell'Orsa Maggiore: come faranno? Ecco: urtano il timone: oltrepassano la quattro ruote: anche l'Orsa è lasciata indietro. (707)

dove la pausa segnata dalla punteggiatura isola sotto forte cesura la singola parola, che diventa unità melodica breve e forte sia nell'essenzialità espressiva che nel suo isolamento musicale:

Tutto è vita, accettata, amata, difesa, benedetta. (532)  
 cresciuta, imbrigliata, immiserita, imbruttita: col suo reale nome e cognome ... (758)  
 acqua che corre, riflettendo, capricciosa, sole, nubi, ali, fronde (502)  
 ciascun tronco a cui mi accostavo pareva avesse qualcosa da dirmi: sostavo, sospesa, attenta, aspettando: poi riprendevo ... (718)

In queste prose si riscontra, inoltre, una forte predilezione per frasi progressive e regressive, di tipo regolare, dove l'unità più breve a connotazione aggettivale fissa l'azione nel tempo o nello spazio ed un'unità più ampia a connotazione verbale e dinamica descrive l'azione nel tempo. Le seguenti esemplificazioni mostrano la tendenza della Negri a produrre una scrittura che insiste su un controllo geometrico dei sintagmi nella costruzione di unità melodiche: frasi progressive bimembri, le cui unità melodiche corrispondono per estensione:

vigili custodi, che durante l'intera notte hanno protetto il mio riposo:

amici fedeli, che trascorreranno con me l'intera giornata (695)  
La stufa riartizzata, subito: un tè bollente, con latte e cognac, subito:  
aperta, subito, una scatola di biscotti. (949)  
e frase regressive la cui musicalità è scandita dal segno di interpun-  
zione che gioca il ruolo della cesura, in calare regressivo, come le  
seguenti:  
A poco a poco, con gradazione inavvertita, l'orchestra aerea si atte-  
nuia, si spegne: il lago si placa. (466)  
Nella faccia di lucido bronzo gli occhi distratti hanno mutato col-  
ore: si son fatti più scuri, quasi neri, indecifrabili. (905)

Un altro aspetto peculiare della prosa negriana è l'uso copioso della metaforizzazione. Si spiega così il compiaciuto perdersi nella descrizione puntuale di fiori, animali, paesaggi che si spinge fino alla personificazione degli elementi della natura eletti a protagonisti degli stessi racconti. L'uso della trascrizione metaforizzata va interpretata come la necessità di utilizzare una sorta di stratagemma retorico-psicologico che rende più agevole o accettabile la visione del mondo. In altri termini, par di capire che la natura metaforizzata di Ada Negri si ponga come segno evidente di non accettazione del mondo che muta, del progresso, della modernità,

Qualche orticello tuttora vivo, ma destinato a scomparire mostra qua e là magari ciuffi d'insalata, alberelli rachitici. Dovunque si fabbrica: l'erba ha paura di crescere fra quel disordine di calce e mattoni. Ha paura della polvere, e di quel dannato picchiare e scarrucolare. Una rete di novissime vie, che solo ieri non c'erano: tronche, l'una senza un braccio, l'altra senza una gamba, sfocianti nelle praterie brulle: di qui baracche pei muratori, di là caldaioni per il catrame, in fondo una tettoia donde mi vengono vibrazioni sonore di verghe battute da magli: sembrano rintocchi di campana.  
Terra, buona terra: vorrebbe, essa, dare come una volta erbe, fiori, grano; ma non è ormai che un suolo da scavare per fondamenta. So che né malve né viole troverò fra le gramigne cenericce. (690)

È una delle sequenze metaforiche costanti di *Di giorno in giorno*, dove gli elementi della natura tendono ad imporsi come nostalgia, come contemplazione affettuosa, fissati nella dimensione atemporale della memoria. La vita si configura per la scrittrice come contemplazione, in apparenza immobile, della natura che ha in sé il potere di rinnovamento interiore. Non a caso la scrittrice si paragonerà ad un bruco "che si trova senza difese accanto a me, come io lo sono di fronte alle forze maggiori della mia. Due atomi: due misteri: due solitudini: due debolezze senza scampo." (708)

## NOTE

<sup>1</sup> U. Guglielmotti, *Grandi italiani* (Roma: C.E.N., 1970) 878.

<sup>2</sup> Il carteggio Negri-Mussolini è stato pubblicato in Appendice al volume di S. Comes, *Ada Negri da un tempo all'altro* (Milano: Mondadori, 1970).

<sup>3</sup> Nel 1921 il Duce affidò alla Negri il suo diario personale: "Vi lascio in custodia un «Diario» in cui si parla di Lei [Margherita Sarfatti] e di me." La lettera non porta data ma è sicuramente collocabile tra la fine di giugno e i primi di luglio 1921, in quanto Mussolini fa espressamente riferimento alla recensione che farà a *Stella Mattutina*, che apparirà sul *Popolo d'Italia* il 9 luglio 1921. La Negri era spesso ospite della Sarfatti nella villa «Il Soldo» a Cavallasco presso Como, dove su insistenza della Sarfatti, compose il volume *Le Solitarie*.

<sup>4</sup> Mussolini aveva recensito favorevolmente, *Stella mattutina* di Ada Negri in *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 9 luglio 1921, ravvisando nel comune Socialismo il movente per l'impegno civile, che per l'una si era concretizzato nell'esperienza poetica in lui in quello politica ("Il Socialismo è stato per la Negri poetica, come per me, ad esempio, un'esperienza politica").

<sup>5</sup> Ada Negri, lettera a Mussolini, 19 giugno 1924, Comes 121.

<sup>6</sup> Ada Negri, lettera a Mussolini, 4 giugno 1925, Comes 124.

<sup>7</sup> Ada Negri, lettera a Mussolini, 19 dicembre 1927, Comes 131.

<sup>8</sup> Ada Negri, lettera a Mussolini, 27 gennaio 1947, Comes 164.

<sup>9</sup> Il premio Mussolini, decretato dalla Reale Accademia d'Italia per la classe di Lettere nella seduta del 31 marzo 1931 e che prevedeva anche la somma di L. 50.000, le fu assegnato per il volume *Vespertina*. Alla cerimonia parteciparono i Reali, alcuni ministri e personaggi della cultura e dell'arte, la prolusione fu letta da Ettore Romagnoli che illustrò l'arte della Negri. Il premio, naturalmente, rinnovò la popolarità della scrittrice e l'interesse della critica sia quella favorevole (Borgese, Benco, Ravagnani, Gigli, Villaroel, Franci, Rivalta, ecc.) sia quella meno benevola dei "giovani critici" che "si ingegnano a stroncarmi in tutti i più perfidi modi. E sì che ne ho fatta di strada da *Maternità*." Ada Negri, lettera ad Auro d'Alba, A. d'Alba, *Formato tessera* (Milano: Ceschina, 1956) 37.

<sup>10</sup> La sera del 5 marzo 1936 il Comune di Milano, sotto gli auspici del Circolo Filologico Milanese, organizzò una manifestazione in onore della scrittrice cui parteciparono Ministri, Accademici d'Italia e alte personalità dello Stato. La prolusione fu tenuta da G. Villaroel. La cerimonia fu ripetuta all'Università di Pavia.

Il 24 giugno 1936 le fu conferito il Premio Firenze per il volume «Il Dono» con una solenne cerimonia a Palazzo Vecchio dove F.T. Marinetti tenne la prolusione. In una lettera al Patrizia la Negri scrisse: "L'oratore era Marinetti e fece un bellissimo discorso. Al mio fianco erano il governatore di Roma on. Bottai, Alessandro Pavolini il Podestà, Ugo Ojetti, ecc. [...] Del *Dono* si sta preparando la seconda edizione" Lettera al Patrizia del 24 luglio 1936. Il *Dono* aveva avuto una enorme eco sulla stampa, dal febbraio 1936, data in cui uscì, fino alla metà di aprile dello stesso anno si contano circa 250 scritti, tra articoli e recensioni, dedicati al volume negriano.

<sup>12</sup>Nel 1937 le venne conferita dal Ministro dell'Educazione Nazionale la Medaglia d'Oro "per alta benemerita culturale". "Il Ministro Bottai mi ha scritto giorni fa una lettera privata, nella quale mi annuncia che la Medaglia d'oro avrà una corresponsione annua di 24.000 lire. Con grande delicatezza aggiunge che io devo considerare tale corresponsione unicamente come un giusto riconoscimento del Paese verso la mia opera di poesia. Tale pensione è un "corrispondente" dell'Accademia, chiusa alle donne." Ada Negri, lettera al Patrizi, 31 dicembre 1937.

<sup>13</sup>Il premio fu conferito il 21 aprile del 1931 alla presenza del Re e della Regina. Relatore fu Ettore Romagnoli. "Il sentimento di così e ricca ispirazione è da ricercare nella prontissima sensibilità della poetessa. Tutti gli stimoli del mondo esterno, e quelli che, generati negli arcani penetrali dello spirito, rimangono nascosti alle più acute investigazioni, urtano con tanta violenza i centri di sensibilità in cui si genera la parola, che li rendono saturi, e bisognosi d'esplosione. E nelle parole, le immagini del mondo sensibile appaiono riflesse in equivalenti fonici di suggestione magica allucinatoria: e le imponderabili essenze che popolano l'oscurissimo limbo della subcoscienza, e che nella maggior parte degli uomini rimangono fatue ed informi sensazioni, affiorano anch'esse alla luce, convertite in strana eppur lucida fantasmagoria". *Annuario della Reale Accademia d'Italia*, III, 1930-1931(Roma: Reale Accademia d'Italia, 1932) 236-237.

<sup>14</sup>Si legga la lettera del 19 dicembre 1927: "Nell'occasione del conferimento, meritatissimo, del Premio Nobel alla mia gloriosa consorella Grazia Deledda, non posso dimenticare che due anni or sono Vostra Eccellenza ebbe l'estrema bontà di considerare la povera opera mia come degna d'essere proposta all'Accademia Nobel. Io non mi sono mai illusa, ritenendomi da tanto. Ma in questo momento sento il bisogno di dire a Vostra Eccellenza che alla mia coscienza e alla mia vita basta come conforto il pensiero che la Vostra altissima mente e il Vostro grande cuore mi hanno trovata non indegna dell'onore di quel Premio. E di ciò sono paga." Ada Negri, lettera a Mussolini, 19 dicembre 1927, Comes 130-131. A proposito della nomina della Negri all'Accademia E. Montale scrisse che "Bastò allora, per essere detto scrittore fascista, l'aperta adesione al regime o meglio ancora qualche esplicita piaggeria al suo fondatore. Una donna fu ammessa unica all'accademia d'Italia; aveva descritto lungamente sul «Corriere della Sera» le belle mani del Duce." E. Montale, "Il Fascismo e la letteratura: la lezione dei "maestri", *Novecento*, ed. vol. 6 (Milano: Marzorati, 1963) 3027.

<sup>15</sup>Nella Giacomelli, maestra elementare lodigiana, era accusata di connivenza con l'anarchico Gino Lucetti, l'attentatore di Mussolini, e condannata al confino. L'intervento della Negri è risolutivo come si legge nella risposta di Mussolini "La vostra raccomandata Nella Giacomelli sarà posta in libertà prossimamente oggi aut domani stop", Benito Mussolini, telegramma ad Ada Negri, 12 agosto 1928, Comes 134.

<sup>16</sup>"Ringrazio intanto l'Eccellenza Vostra d'aver approvato la scelta caduta su di me per il testo di Stato della III classe elementare. Dalla Commissione attendo qualche schiarimento che mi dimostrì se tale compito sia nella possibilità delle mie

forze: cosa di cui, sinceramente, dubito.” [Il libro non fu poi scritto dalla Negri ma da Grazia Deledda]. Ada Negri, lettera a Mussolini, 31 dicembre 1929, Comes 137.

<sup>17</sup> Nella lettera del 12 marzo 1934 la Negri ringrazia il Duce per “il dono inaspettato e prezioso” come “riconoscimento della mia opera di tant’anni”, Ada Negri, lettera a Mussolini, 12 marzo 1934, Comes 146.

<sup>18</sup> L’editore Mondadori chiese al Segretario particolare del Duce l’autorizzazione ufficiale per utilizzare una frase tratta dall’articolo del Duce su *Stella Mattutina* sulla fascetta, che avrebbe adornato la ristampa del volume. A. Mondadori, lettera a Chiavolini, 28 febbraio 1938, Comes 128.

<sup>19</sup> Ada Negri, lettera a Mussolini, 20 marzo 1939, Comes 150-151.

<sup>20</sup> ora in *Introduzione ai contemporanei* (Napoli: Morano, 1939) 64-65.

<sup>21</sup> Cfr. G. Carrocci, *Storia d’Italia dall’Unità a oggi* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1978) 288-90. Anche un’altra nota scrittrice dell’epoca Milly Dandolo, condividendo la posizione della Negri, scrisse un articolo sulla rivista *Lei*, in cui celebrava l’offerta della fede nuziale come contromisura alle aggressioni straniere. “Sappia il mondo che ogni grammo di quest’oro, fuso nella fucina dell’amore, si moltiplicherà come il pane del Vangelo, diventerà, per la Patria, sorgente inesauribile di ricchezza e di forza, garanzia di un sereno avvenire.” M. Dandolo, “Mani nude. 18 Dicembre giornata della fede”, *Lei*, dicembre 1935.

<sup>22</sup> A. Negri, “L’anello d’acciaio”, *Il Corriere della Sera*, 18 dicembre 1935.

<sup>23</sup> Sulla politica (anti)femminista fascista si cfr. V. De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1992); P. Guida, *Letteratura femminile del ventennio fascista* (Lecce: PensaMultimedia 2000).

<sup>24</sup> Ma rinviene evidentemente anche dall’ambiente familiare in cui ha vissuto. La nonna, Peppina Panni, portinaia in casa Barni, aveva interiorizzato la propria condizione di serva come una necessità del tutto naturale al punto da provare sincera riconoscenza verso i signori per quel senso di “appartenenza” alla nobile famiglia. Anche sua madre, operaia nel «fabbricone» dei Cingia per 1,75 lire al giorno, festività escluse.

<sup>25</sup> Sul piano biografico è interessante notare che proprio la Negri ci ha provato a “tradire le sue origini” sposando un borghese. Il matrimonio finì presto con una separazione.

<sup>26</sup> B. Merry, “Ada Negri”, *Italian Women Writers*, ed. R. Russel (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994) 299.

<sup>27</sup> Tutte le citazioni sono prese dal volume A. Negri, *Prose*, ed. B. Scalfi e E. Bianchetti (Milano: Mondadori 1956).

<sup>28</sup> In una lettera del 10 novembre 1939 la Negri risponde a Luigi Pasquini, il quale aveva pubblicato il racconto “La Pia”, in cui narra di una bambina, figlia di contadini, costretta ad interrompere gli studi per le ristrettezze economiche: “Dunque Pia Moretti fa la quinta elementare. Bisogna [...] seguirla, veder se, come resistenza fisica, potrebbe affrontare gli studi magistrali: se sì, trovare poi modo

d'aiutarla per mezzo di qualche ente. Quale voi l'avete descritta, temo in lei una sensibilità troppo acuta, segno quasi certo di un fisico debole. Io avevo salute da vendere, alla sua età e dopo: la carriera degli studi esige salute corporale e morale, e voi lo sapete meglio di me. Il Leopardi è un'eccezione.” Ancora, a proposito degli studi femminili, sul caso di una studentessa universitaria indigente scriverà al Pasquini: “Se costei fosse la figlia dei genitori di Pia, ecco che farebbe la contadina e sposerebbe un bifolco, e sarebbe normale e felice, forse.” L. Pasquini, “Lettere di pace e di guerra di Ada Negri”, *Nuova Antologia*, novembre 1965: 370-371.

<sup>29</sup> Ma già nelle poesie “Insieme”, “Ilda”, “Epitaffio”, “La morte”, “Il dono”, “Passione”, “Il figlio che non nacque”, “Destino”, “Martha”).

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REBECCA HOPKINS

RE-EXAMINING FEMALE DESIRE:  
INHERITANCE LAW, COLONIALISM, AND FOLKLORE  
IN GRAZIA DELEDDA'S "LA VOLPE"

Grazia Deledda's short story "La volpe"—published in 1912 as part of the collection *Chiaroscuro*—has been largely ignored by critics. The story engages in a compelling inter-textual dialogue with Giovanni Verga's canonical novella "La lupa" (published thirty-two years earlier). While Verga's novella has been celebrated for its sensitivity to psychological and socio-economic issues, Deledda's short story, as we shall see, is complex and sophisticated in its treatment of similar issues. Yet, rather than an imitation of Verga's "veristic" style and theatics (of which Deledda is often accused), "La volpe" constitutes an important "feminist" revision of Verga's problematic *femme fatale*.<sup>1</sup>

The lack of critical attention given to "La volpe" makes sense when one considers scholars' underestimation of Deledda's work as a whole. This underestimation can be partially attributed to the tendency to read Deledda's use of folkloric themes, characters, and language as trite, outdated, and even at odds with feminist theory.<sup>2</sup> Feminist critics find many of Deledda's female characters problematic in that the folkloric elements of the text seem to oversimplify their controversial actions and behaviour (e.g. murder, incest, and desire for material wealth) by assigning them to traditional gender roles within larger folk notions of destiny, religion, and nature.<sup>3</sup> As a result, the female characters seem not only psychologically "primitive" and morally corrupt, but irrevocably downtrodden and lacking in autonomy. It is this misinterpretation that has most likely led to what a recent anthology of Italian women writers describes as the lack of appeal that Deledda's female protagonists hold for many feminist critics since feminist criticism tends to favor female characters that "celebrate autonomy" (Migiel 115).

Yet, in fact, many of Deledda's female protagonists are autonomous in what they plan to achieve, but these plans for autonomy are ultimately thwarted by the oppressive societies in which they live. This autonomy is

not at odds with Deledda's folkloric style but rather is directly reflected by it. As a result one might say that Deledda's folkloric style acts as a highly political strategy in the realm of the representation of gender re-alignment. My study will show that "La volpe", a deceptively simple tale of rural Sardinian life, is not a trite oversimplification of the female protagonist as victim of a morally fatalistic universe as the folkloric aspects of the text might suggest. Rather, it is a highly complex and even modern portrayal of the female protagonist's aggression and hostility which stem directly from her sexual repression, which is, in turn, the necessary means of economic autonomy. Therefore, it can be said that Deledda not only meets Verga's canonical benchmark by virtue of the psychological and socio-economic complexity of her examination of female oppression, but more importantly begs her own terms of interpretation beyond the confines of Verga's "verismo" (to which Deledda herself denied allegiance). Rather, Deledda deserves to be read as a proto-feminist writer whose proto-feminism rests in her clever use of locally colourful and timeless folkloric systems.<sup>4</sup>

"La volpe" begins with a passage that is characteristic of the folkloric "style" of many of Deledda's texts: "Erano tornate le lunghe e tiepide sere di maggio e ziu Tomas sedeva di nuovo, come l'anno prima, come dieci anni prima, nel cortiletto aperto davanti alla sua cassetta che era come l'ultimo acino d'un grappolo di piccole costruzioni nerastre addossate alla crosta grigia di un monte" ["The long warm nights of May had returned and ziu Tomas sat once again, as the year before, as ten years before, in the open courtyard in front of his little house that was like the last grape of a bunch of little black dwellings leaning up against the gray shell of the mountain"] (201-202).<sup>5</sup> This image discloses a world that is as intimately connected to nature as it is grounded in local mythology:

Solo l'odore dell'erba, alla sera, gli ricordava i pascoli fra cui aveva trascorso la maggior parte della sua vita, e quando la luna sorgeva dal mare lontano, grande e dorata come il sole, e i monti della costa, neri sul cielo d'argento, e tutta la grande vallata e il semicerchio fantastico delle montagne davanti e a destra dell'orizzonte si coprivono di veli scintillanti e di zone d'ombra e di luce che davan l'illusione di foreste e laghi lontani, egli pensava a cose puerili, ai morti, a Lusbè il diavolo che conduce al pascolo le anime dannate tramutate in cinghiali; e se la luna si nascondeva dietro qualche nuvola egli pensava sul serio alle sette vacche figliate che il pianeta andato in quel momento a cena si divorava tranquillamente nel suo nascondiglio. (201-202)

[The smell of the grass in the evening made him think of the fields where he had spent most of his life, and when the moon, big and golden like

the sun, rose from the far-away sea, and the coastal mountains were black on the silver sky, and the entire valley and magical semi-circle of the mountains that lie before and to the right of the horizon became shadowed by starry veils and spaces of shade and light that gave the illusion of forests and far-away lakes, he thought of childish things from when he was young, of the dead, and of Lusbé the devil who leads the damned souls, transformed into wild boars, to the field; and if the moon was covered by clouds he thought with great seriousness of the seven calving cows whom the planet, having gone to dine in that very moment, slowly devoured in its hiding place. ]

While this charming pastoral imagery is partially responsible for Deledda's aesthetic appeal, it also evokes a stagnant world of archaic ritual and custom that fosters traditional gender roles and unchanging systems of patriarchal power in many of Deledda's texts.

Yet, Deledda's genius lies in the almost perverse way she constructs this charming folkloric world only to undermine it with these same elements. That is, Deledda seems to use the folkloric elements of the story only to steer the reader away from a simplistic and archaic folkloric reading.<sup>6</sup>

We see Deledda's clever manipulation of folkloric figures of speech in the story's central metaphor of "la volpe", or "the fox". The metaphor functions on the narrative level as the excuse that the female protagonist, Zana, creates in order to convince the doctor to give her the poison to kill her lover's wife. Referring to local sayings, she tells the doctor that the poison is for "la volpe [che] ci ruba gli agnellini appena nati" ["the fox [that] steals the new-born lambs"] (212).<sup>7</sup> It is revealed in the final scene of the story that "la volpe" is actually a cunning metaphor that gestures at Zia Lenarda, the wife of Zana's lover. Zana indirectly compares the woman, who is much older than either Jacu or Zana, to a "vecchia volpe," or "old fox," who has "stolen" the younger Jacu from Zana (219). It is not until the final scene of the story that the doctor finally solves this riddle and confronts Zana with her own pun: " 'Una volpe! Una volpe! '" [ " 'A fox! A fox! ' " ] (219).

This metaphor of the "volpe" also serves to invoke the provincial world of the characters as it constitutes a charming and locally colourful proverb that is typical of those that circulate throughout agro-pastoral communities. Characteristic of folkloric forms of expression, the proverb reflects the local rural culture of the text through its use of animal and pastoral lore. The metaphor of "la volpe" or " the fox" also establishes the theme of jealousy—a traditional theme of folkloristic narrative—in that the verb "rubare" suggests that Zana is jealous because the old woman "steals" her lover.

Yet, this kind of traditional, one-dimensional reading of the “volpe” metaphor is problematic in the way that it both oversimplifies Zana’s predicament in the story and characterizes her as morally fallible. With great indignation, even Zana herself dismisses Jacu’s similar “reading” of her plan to murder his wife as stemming from a motive as banal as jealousy: “‘Sono forse gelosa di tua moglie, *io*? Di quella vecchia cornacchia, di quella vecchia volpe?’” [“‘You think I am jealous of your wife, *me*? Of that old crow, of that old fox?’”] (219). In fact, Zana’s story of “la volpe” is anything but simplistic.

Rather than a trivial rural saying, the proverb is a crafty and complex pun that Zana resourcefully constructs to conceal her plan to murder Jacu’s wife. Zana—not the old wife—is the true “fox” in Machiavellian terms, and her daring plan implies that besides cunning she has also the quality that Machiavelli attributes to the lion: courage. The story’s economic subtext—that of Zana’s potential inheritance of her grandfather’s fortune—affirms that Zana’s plan to kill “la volpe” is not motivated by simple jealousy, but rather by her desire for financial independence. That is, at the same time that the text gestures at the verb “ruba” [“steals”] and its potential signification of romantic “disinheritance”, it seems to do so only to dismiss that reading as the text ultimately reveals the verb’s more pertinent connotation of economic disinheritance. Therefore, the pun undermines the fatalism attributed to the female sex in the myth of the “sette vacche figliate” also a folkloric saying.

Deledda encourages this more subtle economic interpretation in the telling scene in which Zia Lenarda tells the doctor—who is romantically interested in Zana—that Zana refuses to entertain any of her interested suitors’ advances because none of her suitors are as rich as she is, or rather as she will be when she inherits her grandfather’s fortune:

‘Conoscete ziu Tomas Acchittu?’

Chi non conosceva gli Acchittu?

‘Persino a Nuoro se ne sa la fama, conforto mio! C’è piu d’un laureato che vuol sposare Zana.’

‘Sì, è bella. Non l’avevo mai veduta.’

‘Non esce quasi mai; ma non c’è bisogno che esca, per l’anima mia! La rosa odora anche dentro la casa. E vengono gli stranieri da tutte le parti, persino Nuoro, sì e passano per vederla.’

‘Ma è forse andato il banditore in giro per annunciare la sua bellezza?’

‘Non è questo, per l’anima mia! È che il vecchio è ricco che non sa quanto ha. Terreni quanto il regno di Spagna, e dicono, più di ventimila scudi nascosti in una sua *tanca*. Zana solo sa il posto.

Ecco perché lei non vuole neanche don Juacchinu che è nobile ma non

tanto ricco.' (205-6)

[‘Do you know uncle Tomas Achittu?’]

Who didn’t know the Achittu’s?

‘Even in Nuoro they are famous! There is many a graduate that wants to marry Zana.’

‘Yes, she is pretty. I had never seen her.’

‘She never goes out; but there’s no need, by my old soul! The perfume of the rose is just as sweet in the home. And the foreigners come from all over, even Nuoro, to see her.’

‘Is it possible that the town crier has spread word of her beauty?’

‘Oh dear, it’s not that! It’s that the old man is so rich he doesn’t know how much he has. As much land as the King of Spain, and they say more than twenty thousand *scudi* hidden in his *tanca*. Only Zana knows the place. That’s why she doesn’t want even Juacchinu who is noble, but not so rich.’]

By marrying Jacu, who also stands to inherit a considerable fortune (that of Zia Lenarda), Zana can hope that her grandfather’s money will not fall entirely into the hands of her husband. As a result, she turns away all the other suitors like “ ‘don Juacchinu che è nobile ma non tanto ricco’ ” [“ ‘don Juacchinu who is noble but not so rich.’ ”].<sup>8</sup>

Like Zana’s proverb/pun about “*la volpe*”, the simplistic quality of the old woman’s folkloristic proverb—“ ‘la rosa odora anche dentro la casa’ ” [“ ‘the perfume of the rose is just as sweet in the home’ ”]—also conceals the actual complexity of Zana’s predicament. While Zana’s proverb mainly reveals her *economic* desire, the old woman’s proverb points to Zana’s *sexual* desire. On the primary level of signification the old woman’s proverb communicates to the doctor that despite Zana’s self-imposed exile in her grandfather’s house, the beautiful or “rose”-like Zana still attracts suitors. Yet, her proverb might also be read as a metaphor of sexual desire that has been relegated to a restrictive domestic space. Therefore, “*la rosa odora anche in casa*” is not just a banal country saying about a young girl’s beauty, but a potent symbol of sexual repression—or what Deledda intuits as sexual repression even without the knowledge of an explicitly “technical” psychoanalytic vocabulary. Other figures of speech that suggest this same double signification (folkloric-psychanalytic) punctuate the story. Other examples include a simile so deceptively simple as “*i suoi occhi splendevono d’un fulgore profondo, come d’una fiamma lontana che brillasse in una notte di tenebre giù in fondo a un bosco*” [“her eyes shone with an underlying brilliance like a flame far-way in a gloomy night and deep in a forest”] (214). Both figures of speech point to a notion of psychic depth

and the idea that some of the protagonist's motives are to be found buried in her subconscious.

These tropes of sexual desire are directly connected with the question of Zana's inheritance as they suggest the extreme measures that Zana as a woman in turn-of-the-century Sardinia is forced to take as a result of her economically precarious situation. Sexual and economic repression become one in Deledda's story as the text reveals the dilemma in which Zana finds herself regarding the conflict between legal inheritance and rural social customs. That is, while the law regarding women's inheritance in Italy at the turn-of-the-century granted women the right to familial inheritance, social custom often dictated the opposite (Casanova 123; Calvi 134). Although technically a woman in Zana's position would be eligible to inherit family property and money (as provided by the Pisanelli law of January 1866), the reality was that women would often renounce their inheritance rights in a kind of gesture at preserving patriarchal tradition. Even if a woman did retain her inheritance rights, both law and social custom dictated that her husband would become administrator of her property (De Giorgio 334). To further complicate the issue, local custom regarding inheritance in agrarian societies often differed quite dramatically from that in urban areas. Since land was often the terms of inheritance, agrarian families often resorted to granting "la dote", or dowry, to eligible daughters rather than risk dispersing family land into the hands of the husbands of the female members (Casanova 123-124; Calvi 11; 128-129). Therefore, in either case inheritance for women at this time was a "no-win" situation.

The text highlights the complexity of the historical situation by suggesting that Zana will inherit her grandfather's money and land at the same time that it leaves various ends untied regarding that inheritance. Rather than explicitly say that Zana will "inherit" the grandfather's money, the servant says that "Zana solo sa il posto" ["Only Zana knows its place"]. As a result, the story suggests that there are other factors that may prevent Zana from obtaining her grandfather's money and land so easily. While the lack of reference to other family members suggests that Zana is indeed her grandfather's only eligible heir, we know that social custom in rural societies tended to disinherit women from the patriarchal fortune—which often consisted of land—so as to retain the land in the family. In which case, it is possible that Zana would still receive a dowry. In order to receive that dowry, however, she would need to become engaged before her grandfather dies so that her dowry is not threatened by the potential claim of a next of kin to the entire sum of the grandfather's fortune (Calvi 124-129). The text encourages this latter reading as the story begins with the discov-

ery of her grandfather's waning health, thereby explaining Zana's urgency regarding the need to resolve the "problem" of Jacu's marriage to Zia Lenarda. In fact, the text implies that Zana may not even plan to marry, but she must at least be engaged if she hopes to receive a dowry. Zana's proverb about "la volpe" directly engages this problem of local inheritance custom as the oral nature of the proverb seems to stage an implicit resistance to the "orality" of local inheritance custom—the *unwritten* local "law" which proves to be the real source of Zana's economic problems. Just as Zana's pun about the fox makes its point indirectly, so does local inheritance custom. Both systems of communication assume authority through oral and indirect expression. The story contrasts this form of communication which is attributed to the rural society of the text with the 1) written and 2) direct expression of the doctor's bourgeois culture, which is seen in the letter he writes for Zia Lenarda, as well as in the prescriptions, and the books with which he surrounds himself.

While many scholars argue that Deledda's stories are unhistorical, her attention in this story to the situation of women regarding inheritance suggests that we reconsider her work as actually responding directly to concrete historical and economic issues concerning women.<sup>9</sup> That is not, however, to deny the timeless qualities of the agrarian societies Deledda represents. Rather, one might say that Deledda draws an ironic contrast between the archaic nature of the provincial society in which the female characters live and the complexity and contemporary nature of these women's desires. That is, there seems to be a malignant continuity between the timeless wisdom of proverbs of this archaic society and the stubbornly anti-woman rationale that still characterizes the treatment of women in the new Italy.

But as we have seen Zana has a rather unorthodox and even perverse way of redirecting the meaning of timeless proverbs to suit her own particular historical predicament. Indeed from her point of view—and the text's—more important than the question of how Zana will inherit her grandfather's money (inheritance as opposed to dowry) is *whom* she will marry, since her husband will inevitably have the right to administer her possessions (Casanova 146-147; De Giorgio 334). Ironically, if Zana wishes to retain a modicum of financial independence and dignity, it is essential that she marry Jacu who is already rich by virtue of being married to the wealthy Zia Lenarda and therefore poses less of a threat to her own administration of her fortune.

We can infer from the text that as a direct consequence of her Machiavellian need to marry Jacu—who is away on military duty and a married man—Zana must temporarily repress her sexual instinct. Not

only does Zana refuse the advances of her suitors—particularly those of the doctor—but she never even leaves her grandfather's house (as the servant tells the doctor, “non esce quasi mai.”). As a result, her sexual existence and political development into a wife and mother according to the patriarchal order are thwarted and replaced, in a kind of compromise with patriarchy, by her domestic duty as caretaker in her grandfather's home. In fact, Zana first appears in the story through the point of view of the doctor, who is on his way to check on Zana's grandfather. When the doctor sees Zana, she avoids his gaze and returns to her work in the kitchen, reassuming her position as caretaker: “Vedendolo, ella rientrò nella cucina, prese un lume e si piegò sulle ginocchia davanti alla stuoa del nonno mentre Zia Lenarda correva a prendere dalla stanza interna una seggiolina dipinta per offrirla al dottore” [“Seeing him, she went back in the kitchen, took a candle and knelt before the grandfather's mat while Zia Lenarda ran to get an old painted chair from the other room to offer to the doctor”] (204). The contrast of her domestic position “davanti alla stuoa del nonno” [“before the grandfather's mat”] with the amorous/sexual gaze of the doctor establishes the tension throughout the story between domestic duty and sexual desire.

Zana's denial of sexual satisfaction for the sake of economic security is a perfect case study of Freud's theory of sexual repression in which the “pleasure principle” is transformed into the “reality principle” (Freud *Civilization* 26). Freud defines this transformation as the unconscious repression of the “id,” or “libidinal instinct,” by the “ego” and “super ego,” or “self-preservation instinct” (Freud *Inhibitions* 76). Herbert Marcuse's Marxist reading of Freud in *Eros and Civilization* poignantly redefines this transformation as the change in instinctual values from “immediate satisfaction” to “delayed satisfaction,” from “pleasure” to “the restraint of pleasure,” from “play” to “work,” from “receptiveness” to “productiveness,” and from “absence of repression” to “security” (76).

Zana's temporary deferral of sexual gratification works against the patriarchal system by working within it. But at what costs? Zana resembles other Deleddian female protagonists, such as Marianna Sirca and Cosima, in that her means of empowerment ironically hinge upon her marginalization in her grandfather's house.<sup>10</sup> According to Freud the consequences of the repression of sexual instincts include, but are not limited to, hostility, aggression, anxiety, and ambivalence—all four of which perfectly characterize Zana's peculiar behaviour in the story.<sup>11</sup> For example, the first time Zana meets the doctor, she is so defensive and hostile that the intimidated doctor finally leaves: “La sua bocca era così sdegnosa che l'uomo se ne andò via quasi intimidito” [“Her mouth was so scornful that the man left almost

intimidated" (205). Contemporary criticism has, in fact, examined the way Freud applied his theory of hostility and sexual repression to women. Freud claimed that female hostility was actually just a reflection of innate aggression which social customs naturally tended to repress in women (Freeman 244-245). Freud argued that often a woman's hostility is the result of her frustration as she is relegated to the background and made to be dependent on her husband's own sexual desires (Freud *Civilization* 59). Zana's self-induced sexual repression and resulting hostility interestingly subverts Freud's theory in that Zana imposes sexual repression upon herself as a means of stepping out from her subordinate position. In which case, in her attempt to possess some kind of agency in order to escape societal oppression, she ends up oppressing herself more. Or does she? Is this a better solution than merely acquiescing to the fate of her sex?

Returning to the image of Zana's "bocca sdegnosa," or "scornful mouth," we see that it is an image that reappears throughout the story, including the first physical description of her:

...gli parve di non aver mai veduto un viso più bello e più enigmatico: un pò largo sulla fronte coperta fin sulle sopracciglia, una più alta dell'altra, da due bande di capelli neri e lucenti, finiva in un mento sottile e sporgente: gli zigomi lisci proiettavano un po' d'ombra sulle guance rientranti, e i denti bianchissimi, serati, davano alcunchè di crudele alla bocca sdegnosa, mentre i grandi occhi neri erano pieni di tristezza d'un languore profondo. (204)

[...it seemed that he had never seen a face more beautiful or enigmatic: a little long in the forehead that was covered from the eyebrows up, one higher than the other, with two locks of black shiny hair. It ended in a subtle chin that stuck out a bit: the sleek cheekbones protruded a little from the shadow of the indented cheeks, and her white, sharp teeth gave an air of cruelty to her scornful mouth, while her black eyes were weak and full of sadness. ]

In addition to the image of her "bocca sdegnosa," the "zigomi lisci," "capelli neri," "mento sottile e sporgente," and "i denti bianchissimi serati" all depict Zana as a kind of fierce, wild animal. Therefore, not only in terms of her cleverness, but also as seen in her physical attributes, she—and not Jacu's wife—is the real "fox". Or is she? Deledda's imagery deliberately plays with the tradition of the *femme fatale*, where female sexuality is portrayed as aggressive and often associated with wild animals. Yet, the text suggests that Zana's animalistic aggression and "fox"-like duplicity are not reflective of an innate moral flaw, but rather of a neurosis that devel-

ops as the result of her social and economic frustration as a young, single female attempting to secure some kind of economic independence in rural turn-of-the-century Sardinia.

The depiction of Zana as this kind of wild animal or “volpe” recalls Verga’s highly sexual and aggressive Pina, who is referred to as “La Lupa” or “The She-wolf” in the short story by the same name. Similar to Deledda’s depiction of Zana, Verga constructs Pina’s animalistic or wolf-like sexuality in folkloric terms:

Era alta, magra; aveva soltanto un seno fermo e vigoroso da bruna e pure non era più giovane; era pallida come se avesse sempre adosso la malaria, e su quel pallore due occhi grandi così, e delle labbra fresche e rosse, che vi mangiavano. (197)

[She was tall, thin; she had the firm and vigorous breasts of the olive-skinned—and yet she was no longer young; she was pale, as if always plagued by malaria, and in that pallor, two enormous eyes like this, and fresh red lips which devoured you.] (3)

Pina or “La Lupa” is at once the protagonist of Verga’s short story and of the local story within Verga’s story. Characteristic of folkloric tales, Pina’s symbolic name precedes her in the text, for from the beginning of the short story she is referred to as “la Lupa” by both the narrator and townspeople. Verga uses the demonstrative technique of oral narrative to emphasize the way “La Lupa” is inextricably tied up with town legend. As if telling the story to a crowd, the narrator emphasizes her “due occhi grandi così” [“two big eyes like this”] (197).<sup>12</sup> As a result there is the sense that “La Lupa” has been the “La Lupa”—overly sexual and highly aggressive—for an indefinite amount of time.

Ironically, twentieth century feminist criticism might be inclined to re-read *La Lupa*’s behaviour as a direct result of her difficult economic and sexual predicament as a single mother in a restrictive society in which it is not acceptable for women to have sexual relations outside of marriage. The story, however, does not totally support such a reading (tempting as it may be) in the way that Deledda’s story invites a more empathetic reading. Whereas Deledda’s story contains that key scene between the doctor and his servant in which the issues of inheritance, marriage, and sexual repression are all brought to the reader’s attention (and hence act as permission to re-evaluate the causes of Zana’s behaviour), Verga’s story does not present the details of Pina’s single motherhood in any significant way. In fact, Pina’s role as single mother seems to function in the story only as a way to set up her perverse behaviour as a mother who is interested in her daugh-

ter's fiancé. Nor do there seem to be any economic hardships attached to her role as single mother. Pina has her husband's money and a house of her own. As for any implications of sexual repression that may be tied to her being a single mother in a restrictive society, the story is quite clear that she has never repressed her sexual desires—even before the onset of her desire for Nanni. While some of her problematic behaviour is presented as being a result of her economic and sexual frustrations, the story never distinguishes between these frustrations that are specific to particular situations and moral flaws which precede such social conditions. Her behaviour up to the point of her problems with Nanni can be read only as some kind of moral and predetermined character flaw, and not as sexually or economically determined. Therefore, whereas Deledda sets up "La Volpe" so that we are to infer that Zana becomes hostile and "fox"-like as a result of specific events (the issue of inheritance and her marriage), Pina's "wolf"-like aggressivity is not a result of specific circumstances. Rather, she enters the story as a sexually ravenous, and morally and spiritually corrupt woman, and it is suggested that she has always been so:

Al villaggio la chiamavano *la Lupa* perché non era sazia giammai—di nulla. Le donne si facevano la croce quando la vedevano passare, sola come una cagnaccia, con quell' andare randagio e sospettoso della lupa affamata; ella si spolpava i loro figliuoli e i loro mariti in un batter d'occhio, con le sue labbra rosse, e se li tirava dietro alla gonnella solamente a guardarli con quegli occhi da satanasso, fossero stati davanti all'altare di Santa Agrippina. Per fortuna *la Lupa* non veniva mai in chiesa né a Pasqua, né a Natale, né per ascoltar la messa, né per confessarsi—Padre Angiolino di Santa Maria di Gesù, un vero servo di Dio, aveva persa l'anima per lei. (197)

[In the village they called her the She-wolf, because she never had enough—of anything. The women made the sign of the cross when they saw her pass, alone as a wild bitch, prowling about suspiciously like a famished wolf; with her red lips she sucked the blood of their sons and husbands in a flash, and pulled them behind her skirt with a single glance of those devilish eyes, even if they were before the altar of Saint Agrippina. Fortunately, the She-wolf never went to church, not at Easter, not at Christmas, not to hear Mass, not for confession—Father Angiolino of Saint Mary of Jesus, a true servant of God, had lost his soul on account of her.] (3)

The narrator begins to tell the story of Pina's interaction with Nanni—what would seem to be the origin of her sexual desire and consequential repression—by referring to Pina as "la Lupa," and as such condemns her even before she has done anything to deserve the problematic name:

Una volta *La Lupa* si innamorò di un bel ragazzo che era tornato da soldato, e mieteva il fieno con lei nelle chiuse del notaro, ma proprio quello che si dice innamorarsi, sentirsi ardere le carni sotto al fustagno del corpetto, e provare, fissandlo negli occhi, la sete che si ha nelle ore calde di giugno, in fondo alla pianura. (197)

[One day the She-wolf fell in love with a handsome young man who had just returned from the service and was mowing hay with her in the fields of the notary and she fell in love in the strongest sense of the word, feeling the flesh afire beneath her clothes; and staring him in the eyes, she suffered the thirst one has in the hot hours of June, deep in the plain.] (3-4)

Zana's own hostility is evident not only in the text's "fox" imagery, but like Pina's "wolf" behaviour, it is evident in every one of her social interactions in the story. The scene with Zana and the old women of the town at the "tosatura" is particularly revealing. Zana's curt speech, hostility, and malicious curses show her mounting anxiety: "Zana allora si stizzì. 'Mala fata vi guidi, lasciatemi in pace'" ["Zana became irritated. Damn you all, leave me alone"] (215). In turn, the women's reactions to her strange behaviour confirm its inappropriateness: "Allegra, Zana!" ["Cheer up, Zana!"] (205).

In the final scene with Jacu, she is equally hostile and even seems to intimidate Jacu—who is suddenly quiet—just as she intimidates the doctor: "L'uomo, forse intento a vuotar la lana, taceva; ella riprese, esasperata con voce di odio: 'Sono forse gelosa di tua moglie? Di quella vecchia cornacchia, di quella vecchia volpe? ...Ma tutto finirà...e presto...'" ["The man perhaps wanting to empty the wool, became quiet; exasperated and with a voice full of hate, she began to speak again: 'I am jealous of your wife, me? Of that old crow, that old fox?...But this will all end ...and soon...'] (219). Not only is Zana angry, but she is "exasperated" with a voice now resembling a "gemito," or "groan" (218). The ellipses evoke her momentary descent into a kind of hysteria. Hysteria, according to Freud, is the most extreme symptom of sexual repression (Freud *Inhibitions* 25).

While these scenes with the other women are telling, Zana's hostility is most evident in her interactions with the doctor. Her hostility toward the doctor is quite a mystery in the story since the doctor seems to have done nothing to warrant it. For example, when the doctor visits her grandfather a second time to check his health, he asks Zana quite routinely, "'Ebbene, come andiamo?'" ["So, how are you doing?"] (207). Yet, Zana responds to this neutral question with scorn: "'Bene lo vede' disse Zana non senza un lieve accento di disprezzo" ["Good as you can see,' said Zana not with-

out a light hint of scorn" ] (216). In another scene, perhaps the most crucial scene in the story, the doctor advises Zana to change her grandfather's diet and Zana responds aggressively, almost snarling like a wild animal, as the image of her "bocca...sdegnosa" suggests:

'Il vecchio è denutrito...' disse esitando, 'e tu pure, mi pare...Avreste tutti e due bisogno di una cura ricostituente...Se potete...'

Ella capì subito.

'Tutto possiamo!'

La sua bocca era così sdegnosa che l'uomo se ne andò via quasi intimidito. (205)

[ 'The old man is malnourished....,' he said hesitating. 'And you too it seems...You both need a better diet ...if you are able..'

She understood immediately.

'We are able to do everything!'

Her mouth was so contemptuous that the man left almost intimidated.]

We might use Freudian theory of repression and hostility to understand Zana's increased hostility toward the doctor as a particular target. Since the doctor represents the romantic/sexual narrative of the story as he desires Zana and engages her in flirtatious conversation, thereby reawakening the sexual instinct repressed within her, he naturally receives the brunt of her hostility (Freud *Complete Works* 46).

As for the question of murder which lies at the heart of the story, the text suggests that it is the culmination of Zana's hostility and aggression. Her sense of "self-preservation" that is evident in her plan to murder Zia Lenarda is not so much a reaction to the perceived "danger" of her *biological* safety—as Freud would have it—as it is to the endangerment of her social, sexual, and mental safety. There may also be an allegorical dimension to the planned murder of the "legitimate" wife, who would then be replaced by the wild "fox". The murder seems to be a figure of a deadly threat to the economic order of patriarchy itself.

It is fitting that the question of murder is revealed at the "tosatura," the agrarian ritualistic celebration of the fleecing of the sheep. Like the folkloric figures of speech in the text, the "tosatura" is at once the site of rural Sardinian society's local customs and of the culmination of Zana's sexual repression. It is at the "tosatura" that Zana raises the issue of her "penitenza" or "penitence": "Ti giuro...I corvi mi tocchino...se egli mi ha toccato neppure la mano. So io perché gli faccio buon viso...È per il nostro bene...Ma finirà questa penitenza...finirà...e presto..." [ "I swear to you or may the crows poke my eyes out...if he even touched my hand. I put

on a good face for our good...But this penitence...will all be over...and soon...”] (219). By using a metaphor that reflects local ritual (Catholic and agrarian in nature), Zana indirectly correlates her act of penitence, or “penitenza,” as the sacrifice of sexual pleasure, or more specifically as her resistance to the doctor’s “touch”.

Critic Anna Dolfi speaks of the role of “touch,” or “le délice de toucher,” in Deledda’s works. Dolfi examines Freud’s theory of “taboo” and applies it to restrictions of sexual pleasure in Deledda’s stories in order to understand her characters’ sexual repression as deriving from “la conflittualità tra desiderio e divieti” [“the conflict between desire and prohibitions”] that the characters’ societies produce (*Grazia Deledda* 96-99). Applying Dolfi’s theory to “La volpe”, we can better understand the origins of Zana’s sexual repression and consequently her strange behaviour. The rural community of the text—a primarily taboo-based society—prohibits a woman’s sexual gratification outside the organized system of marriage. Even simple conversation with a man without the presence of a chaperon provokes the disapproval of the community. For example, when the doctor follows Zana behind the fountain at the “tosatura”, the father of Jacu, disgusted by Zana’s behaviour, incites the others to condemn her: “La nipote di Tomas Accittu, la vedete? Voleva star sola con l’uomo; se fosse mia figlia le metterei la nuca sotto i calcagni” [“Do you see the granddaughter of Tomas Accittu? She wanted to be alone with that man; if she were my daughter I would put her neck under my heels”] (216). While this dimension of Deledda’s text is undeniable, sexual repression in the story has, as we have seen, a self-willed and historical dimension linked to the protagonist’s specific social and economic situation, and to her rather “perverse” Machiavellian resourcefulness.

Deledda contrasts Zana’s “sacrifice” of touch with the “tosatura”—the more apparent narrative of sacrifice in the story:

All’ombra d’un sovero Jacu, il servo, gli amici, tosavan le pecore stendendole, ben legate, su una larga pietra come sopra un’ara per un sacrificio; i cani si rincorrevarono fra l’erba, gli uccelli fischiavano sulla quercia; un vecchio rassomigliante al profeta Elia raccoglieva la lana entro un sacco e intorno i fiori dell’asfodelo e i gigli selvatici curvati dal vento odoroso pareva si spingessero in avanti curiosi di veder anch’essi ciò che succedeva in mezzo a quel gruppo d’uomini curvi con le cesoje in mano. (215)

[In the shade of a tree Jacu, the servant, the friends, shaved the sheep and lay them out, tying them well on a large rock as on an altar for sacrifice; the dogs chased one another on the grass, the birds whistled on the oak tree; an old man resembling the prophet Elijah collected the wool in a sack

as all around them the flowers of the *asfodelo* and the wild lilies bent by the wind seemed to lean forward, curious also they to see what was happening in the center of that group of men bent over with the shears in their hands. ]

By making this contrast, Deledda brings into a common space two very different issues: the economic and agro-pastoral sphere as represented by Zia Lenarda and Jacu's "tosatura" and the sphere of individual sexual desire as represented by Zana's "penitenza". Deledda's story asks us to consider how these two spheres are related. Where do they meet with respect to the notion of "sacrifice"?

The archaic world of "sacrifice" that the "tosatura" evokes—as a cooperative act of labour for the collective good (which is embedded in the biblical tradition of animal sacrifice, as suggested by the references to "il vecchio rassomigliante al profeta Elia" ["the old man resembling the prophet Elia"])—is not the same type of "sacrifice" that Deledda ascribes to Zana. While the "sacrifice" of the "tosatura" parallels the "sacrifice" that the female members of this archaic community perform for the good of the family, church, and community, Zana's "sacrifice" of sexual pleasure is a direct consequence of her plans to work *against* the social structure by manipulating the system of marriage. Therefore, her "sacrifice" works toward her own interests in the end as it seeks to achieve economic independence from her future husband.

One might say that in her clever, "fox"-like plan to marry Jacu, Zana works *within* the patriarchal system of marriage in order to challenge the social custom of her times in which the female is a kind of commodity or "object of exchange", as termed by Lévi-Strauss (Lévi-Strauss 148; 478). Rather than that which is "exchanged" or commodified within the realm of patriarchal gain, or the "tosatura", Zana attempts to assume an active economic role.

In the same way, we might reconsider the notion of taboo in Deledda's stories as not only indicative of sexual propriety, but of class "propriety" as well. That is, the taboo against speaking to the doctor, or any strange man without a chaperone, is enforced in this society in order to forestall the transgression of sexual mores and maintain the patriarchal system, but it is quite possibly also enforced to avoid the trespassing of class divisions, for the doctor is the epitome of the bourgeois outsider.

Returning to the scene where Zana snaps "Tutto possiamo!" ["We are capable of everything!"] in response to the doctor's medical recommendations, we can begin to see the way the sexual and socio-economic spaces also come together in the form of Zana's hostility. Not only is her hostili-

ty toward the doctor symptomatic of her sexual repression, but it is indicative of an insidious disdain of the bourgeois outsider that the doctor represents. Throughout the story, the doctor is known only as “il dottore”, a title that identifies him by his middle-class profession, which stands in stark contrast to the agro-pastoral class of Zana, her grandfather, Jacu, and the others. Moreover, the doctor’s urban origins are immediately noted by Zana and Zia Lenarda and, consequently, he is marked as an outsider at the same time that he is aligned with the industrial colonizers: “quel *befulanu* del dottore di città...che si crede il medico del re di Spagna” [“that fool the city doctor...that thinks he is the doctor of the King of Spain”] (202). Zana’s hostility interestingly begins before she even meets the doctor, even just upon hearing him described as the doctor “della città” in this scene: “Zia Lenarda, egli è obbligato a venire. Egli prende venti lire al giorno!” disse Zana fieramente” [“Zia Lenarda, he must come. He gets 20 *lire* a day!” said Zana proudly”] (202). It is significant that Zana refers to the doctor’s salary—the economic divide between her own class and his bourgeois one—since disparity in material wealth constitutes the very basis of class struggle.

Yet, even “normal” Marxist correlations between material wealth and class do not hold up in this story. Instead, Deledda deliberately inverts the two so that the agro-pastoral class is the wealthy class whereas the bourgeois class is the poor one. That is, we learn immediately that both Zia Lenarda and Zana’s grandfather own “terreni quanto il Re di Spagna” [“as much land as the King of Spain”] in addition to the money that Zana’s grandfather keeps buried in these *tancas*, or large plots of land. The doctor, on the other hand, having “vuotata la borsa” [“emptied his purse”] and sold his own land, moves to the rural town after realizing that one can not buy “l’amore, la fortuna, il piacere” [“love, fortune, pleasure”] (209). The scene in which the doctor is reading leisurely in his study emphasizes Zana’s contrasting lack of leisure and desperate dependence on money.

This undoing or reversal of the normal relationship between class and wealth is intrinsically tied up with Zana’s decision to wait for Jacu, refuse all other suitors, and thereby repress her sexual instincts. After all, the main reason she wants to marry Jacu is because he is just as rich as she is, while the doctor is poorer. But Deledda also suggests that by marrying Jacu, Zana will be able to maintain the *imbalance* of material wealth between the two classes.

Therefore, might we say that Zana is a political character? If so, is she consciously political? In terms of *class* politics, she does not appear to have a conscious political project. Instead, the text suggests that her own eco-

nomic security is her primary reason for wanting to marry Jacu and murder his wife. The class politics that are evident in her decision, however, are alluded to by the text. Therefore, one might read her political actions not so much as overtly political, but as motivated by what Federic Jameson calls the “political unconscious”: an unconscious social work that is nevertheless potentially effective.<sup>13</sup> Yet, if hers is a kind of “unconscious” political work, it is important to note that Zana’s sexual repression (as a key element of her project) is not a kind of “absurd” unhistorical and instinctive allegiance to her clan, as Dolfi suggests of Deledda’s characters in general, but rather an unconscious response to a contemporary and actively enforced taboo regarding class.<sup>14</sup>

Or is her class disdain, like her decision to marry Jacu, not unconscious at all, but rather similar to her response to the taboo of sexual propriety: a very pragmatic survival tactic for one who does not wish to be marginalized? As a result, what would amount to a rational decision to uphold the class taboo is made by Zana not so much out of an active political interest as out of a very private desire to ensure that her own project of autonomy progresses smoothly. If Zana were to marry the doctor, a bourgeois outsider, she would not only risk losing her money to him, but more importantly she would become a social pariah. Upholding the class taboo is a necessary means to marrying one of its enforcers : Jacu.<sup>15</sup>

Herbert Marcuse’s insightful reading of Freud expands the connection made between sexual repression and the restrictions of one’s civilization in Freud’s *Civilization and Its Discontents* by including the notion of class struggle. Marcuse claims that “the conflict between sexuality and civilization unfolds with this development of economic ‘domination’, whereas Freud limits the connection between civilization and repression to a social one and blatantly rejects the notion that desire for property is the root of aggression” (Freud *Civilization* 71).

We can apply Marcuse’s theories of repression to the struggle between the bourgeois class and the agro-pastoral class as represented by the conflict between the doctor and Zana against the backdrop of the history of Italian colonialism in nineteenth-century Sardinia. The history of Sardinia at this time was a history of oppression by bourgeois outsiders who came from mainland Italy and other European countries. During the period of industrialization in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Italy, these bourgeois outsiders monopolized much of the local land, razing Sardinian forests in order to support the construction of the new Italian railroad and burning large plots in order to produce carbon and ash to send home to Italian factories.<sup>16</sup> As a result, they greatly contributed to the agro-pastoral

class's already unbearable poverty. Deledda alludes to the local people's disinheritance of their land in the first part of the story when Zia Lenarda criticizes the doctor's colleague's purchase of local land with local money:

‘Il nostro dottore è partito: è andato per due mesi in continente per studiare le malattie d’orecchi, perché dice lui che tutti diventan sordi quando si tratta di pagargli il fitto dei suoi pascoli... quasi che questi non li abbia comprati coi denari del paese, la giustizia lo incanti!’ (202)

[‘Our doctor is gone: he went to the continent for two months to study ear diseases because he says that everyone becomes deaf when it comes time to pay him the rent for his land... as if he didn’t buy the land with the town’s money, may justice get him!']

Maria Giacobbe Harder speaks about the “certo sdegnoso disprezzo” [“certain contemptuous scorn”] that characterized the attitude of the descendants of the “re pastori” [“aristocrats of agro-pastoral class”] toward the “nuova élite costituita dalla sparuta borghesia” [“new borghese elite”] in late nineteenth-century Sardinia.<sup>17</sup> This scorn, of course, is very similar to Zana’s own hostile behavior toward the doctor in the story.

As a result of this economic colonization of Sardinia by bourgeois outsiders, and what was known as “zustissia” or “la concreta organizzazione repressiva della legge imposta dal di fuori” [“the concrete repressive organization of the law imposed by outsiders”], many armed resistances were organized among the agro-pastoral class. It was not before long, however, that these armed confrontations evolved into more passive and insidious forms of subversion through the “individuale ‘regolamento di conti’,” or “individual keeping of score.”<sup>18</sup>

It might be said that Zana’s own small-scale, insidious rebellion in the form of marrying Jacu and refusing the advances of the doctor is very much her own sort of “regolamento di conti”. Moreover, it seems that Deledda herself engages in a kind of textual “subversion” in her depiction of Zana’s “regolamento di conti”. The folkloric figures of speech that Deledda employs to depict Zana’s subversion work to mask the doctor’s “reading” of Zana’s plan at the same time they mask the public’s reading of what is for the time a polemic treatment of the “woman question”. In 1912 Italy—before the Suffrage but a good deal after the climactic period of Sardinian resistance—it is perhaps less dangerous to stage such a violent allegory of gender re-alignment through the platform of colonial resistance than through that of gender itself.<sup>19</sup> On the level of the text itself, Zana’s own scandalous project for gender re-alignment is temporarily hidden from the doctor by her use of the local proverb “la volpe [che] ci ruba

gli agnellini appena nati.” A city dweller and, therefore, an outsider to this rural community, the doctor “reads” Zana’s agro-pastoral proverb incorrectly. Obviously unfamiliar in any intimate way with this means of communication, the doctor interprets the proverb literally and as a result fails to detect Zana’s real motive for asking for the poison. In fact, the doctor’s confrontation with Zana at the end of the story coincides with his eventual deciphering of her trope. Like Zia Lenarda’s and Zana’s use of the Sardinian dialect (“beffulanu”), Zana’s local proverb locates the conflict between the doctor and Zana as that between “insider” and “outsider”. Just as dialect is often used as a form of resistance by colonized peoples because of its ability to resist in a somewhat non-confrontational way, the proverb of the “volpe” is used by Deledda for its performance of a more passive and insidious form of resistance.<sup>20</sup>

By drawing this parallel between Zana and the agro-pastoral class rebellion, Deledda not only suggests Zana’s role as victim, but more importantly as “rebel”.<sup>21</sup> The text suggests that Zana’s inheritance or dowry (or whatever means of acquiring this money the text has in mind) will consist of money from her grandfather’s lootings during his days as a bandit. The servant tells the doctor that Zana’s grandfather participated in “più d’una grassazione nel tempo dei tempi” [“more than one looting way back in the time”] when “più di un pastore tornava a casa con la bisaccia colma da una parte di formaggio e dall’altra di posate e monete d’oro” [“when more than one shepherd came home with a lump of cheese and silverware and gold.”] (206). Both Maria Giacobbe-Harder and Susan Briziarelli speak of the historical phenomenon of “banditismo”—the agro-pastoral class’s practice of looting the transported goods of the bourgeois “outsiders” and industrial colonizers. “Banditismo”—the epitome of the local “regolamento dei conti”—is a form of resistance that attacks the system by working within it. By this definition we see the way that the text parallels “banditismo” and Zana’s project of gender alignment which works within the system of marriage in order to work against it.

Briziarelli suggests that by aligning the female characters with these “criminal” figures Deledda makes a problematic statement about the female characters’ moral culpability and hence Deledda’s own “anxiety” toward issues of gender. Yet, in this case a moral reading is exactly what we do not want to do as readers, or else we comply with the very patriarchal order that the story seeks to expose. The text’s suggestion of Zana’s lack of choices within her restrictive society steers us away from completely condemning her at the same time that it discourages us from completely excusing her. That is, at times the text seems to justify Zana’s behaviour as her

own form of “justice,” given that the figures of the “banditi” function in the text more as local heroes rather than criminals.<sup>22</sup> We see this validation of “banditismo” in the servant’s story in which she romanticizes the history of “banditismo” as she looks back on it with nostalgia: “Il vecchio dicono (salva sia l’anima mia, io non nego né affermo) ha preso più d’una grassazione nel tempo dei tempi, quando i dragoni non erano svelti come i carabinieri adesso” [“They say the old man (save my soul, I neither deny nor confirm) took part in more than one looting in the time of all times, when the dragons weren’t as quick as the police today”] (206). Like these unlikely “heroes” of Sardinian colonialism, Zana is very much the “heroine” of the story despite her problematic behaviour. These favourable aspects of the narrative, however, never culminate in Zana’s total exemption since the majority of the story focuses on the disturbing manifestations of Zana’s behaviour. Moreover, the text maintains an emotional distance from Zana by using a strict third person narrative without point of view. As a result, we are never allowed to totally sympathize with Zana. The most ambiguous and crucial scene in the story, the ending, neither rescues Zana nor condemns her.<sup>23</sup> Rather at the same time that the text suggests that her scandalous plot disrupts the tranquility of this archaic and unchanging world, it locates her back within this world of ritual and animals: ““Uh! Una volpe, una volpe!” E i due amanti balzaron fuori dalla capanna, storditi, mentre giù la comitiva cessava di cantare e le donne guardavano qua e là e i cani abbaivano come se davvero passasse la volpe” [““Oh! A fox, a fox!” Shocked, the two lovers jumped out of the cabin while down below the group stopped singing and the women looked here and there, and the dogs barked as if a fox had really passed”] (219). The servant’s refusal to make any moral judgement (“salva anima mia, io non nego né affermo”) [“save my soul, I neither deny nor confirm”] seems to embody Deledda’s own position toward Zana as one that wishes to understand and expose the factor causing Zana’s behaviour. While the text validates the autonomy of her project it does not necessarily excuse her from murder.

Yet, this refusal to make any moral judgement is not evidence of Deledda’s “anxiety” regarding gender roles. Susan Briziarelli criticizes Deledda for the way her characters waver between typically female and typically masculine roles, such as between the passive domestic daughter/wife role and the outlaw/rebel role. She argues that Deledda’s female characters tend to identify more with men than women, and points out that the men that these female protagonists choose to identify with are criminals, thereby dismissing the value of the female characters’ own gender transgressions in the marriage system. Yet, as we have seen in “La volpe” Deledda does

not seek to judge her characters as much as understand them and validate their autonomy. Moreover, Brizziarelli argues that the lack of female solidarity in Deledda's works, which she claims is given less importance by Deledda than is given to the class and political work that the characters perform, is a sign of the characters' ambivalence rather than autonomy, and "anxiety" on Deledda's part. I believe, on the other hand, that just as hostility and aggression are consequences of Zana's sexual repression, so is Zana's ambivalence. Freud names ambivalence as one of the major symptoms of sexual repression (Freud *Inhibitions* 16-39; 72). In the story Zana's ambivalence manifests itself in the way that she wavers between the passive, obedient female as the ideal granddaughter/caretaker, and the *femme fatale* or morally corrupt, sexual "volpe". She alternates between avoiding the doctor's gaze and meeting it unabashedly. At times she seems to flirt with the doctor, but then she immediately changes gears and becomes hostile and cold. We see this erratic behaviour when the narrator notes how Zana sits passively "con le mani intrecciate sulle ginocchia" ["her hands folded on her lap"], and then within seconds becomes angry and aggressive: "Zana allora si stizzi. 'Mala fata vi guidi, lasciatemi in pace...' " ["Zana then became irritated. 'Damn you! Leave me alone...'"] (215). Then, just seconds later, her mood changes again as she flirts with the doctor: "le donne battevano i gomiti sui fianchi di Zana, accennandole il dottore, ed ella a un tratto, cambiato umore, si mise a scherzare con lui" ["the women poked Zana's side with their elbows, motioning at the doctor, and all of a sudden her mood changed and she began to joke with him"] (216).

This change in Zana's behaviour occurs almost always during her interactions with the doctor, as would be expected since the doctor is the one who reawakens sexual desire in Zana as he communicates his own desire to her. Unlike the strange behaviour of "La Lupa," Zana's hostility is evoked by specific circumstances and people. Freud defines ambivalence as the manifestation of the conflict between conscious and unconscious desires, or between the *super ego* and *id* when the ego fails to mediate (Freud *Inhibitions* 16-39; 72). Zana's ambivalence seems to stem from the conflict of a multitude of unconscious and conscious needs and desires, namely her desire for financial autonomy, her desire for sexual satisfaction, the need to obtain the poison to kill Zia Lenarda, her dislike of the doctor as the incarnate reminder of her desire to be with Jacu and her unconscious disdain of the doctor as the bourgeois outsider. The text articulates this conflict of desires in the following passage: "sempre la stessa storia; ella lo lusingava e lo respingeva, e tra l'ingenuo e il perfido domandava la stessa cosa: un veleno" ["always the same story; she flattered him and rejected

him, and between sincerity and deceit she asked always the same thing: the poison"] (217). Therefore, Zana's ambivalence is not so much a sign of her weakness or ambiguity regarding female roles as it is of the frustration of her project of economic autonomy.

By the same token, we may respond to Briziarelli's critique of the apparent lack of "female solidarity" in Deledda's works. In "La volpe" this critique would apply to the fact that Zana kills Zia Lenarda and in doing so seems to destroy the possibility of a joint female project of autonomy.<sup>24</sup> But we must ask why it is that she plans to murder Zia Lenarda rather than Jacu. The reason is, quite simply, because she can not marry Zia Lenarda, and it seems that in this particular society in order for a female to have economic independence and, yet, not risk being socially excluded as a spinster or morally loose woman, or on the other hand sexually repressed, she must marry.<sup>25</sup> Is there really any opportunity for female solidarity in this kind of society any way? The women in this society are pawns in the system of marriage both in terms of their social status and in their lack of legal and locally determined rights to material wealth. While Zia Lenarda is wealthy and Zana potentially so, they cannot marry one another. Yet, as unmarried women they would most likely become social outcasts, sexually repressed, and insane. On the other hand, as married women, there is always the risk of losing that fortune to their husbands. These women need to improve their own situations first before they begin to think of working as a group. Therefore, at this point female autonomy means individual "regolamento di conto" or small-scale resistance rather than an overt collective effort.

Some critics—such as Briziarelli—associate this failure with Deledda's tendency to align her female characters with the anti-colonial project of the "banditi" (28). Yet, why does this connection necessarily suggest a lack of autonomy on the women's part? The narrative of anti-colonial rebellion in the text is all about achieving autonomy by subverting the established order. While the text suggests a connection between Zana's project and the anti-colonial project of the "banditi", Zana's own economic independence is the project of primary importance in the text. Her participation in the class resistance—conscious or not—seems to be only a necessary means to her own project.

In conclusion, it seems that while Zana's predicament is not ideal, her cunning and ambitious plot is woven to carve a space for herself within her oppressive society. The text suggests that at least by choosing whom she marries and manipulating the system so that she can retain control over her money, she imagines relative autonomy, and the possibility of autonomy is certainly better than nothing at all. In fact, the relativity of Deledda's

female protagonists' projects of resistance seems to be the key component in re-evaluating their "feminist" importance. As twenty-first century readers, we ironically tend to prefer *la Lupa*'s direct attack on the patriarchal system and her outright refusal to repress her destructive sexual desire. And yet, *la Lupa*'s "project" for autonomy predictably ends in what the text suggests to be a kind of suicide. While Deledda's story suggests that Zana's plan is also possibly thwarted in the end by the doctor, as the "fox" is out "foxed" when the doctor exposes Zana's secret passion for Jacu to the gaze of the community, the text asks us to think twice before condemning Zana's plan. While her plan for autonomy remains only that—a plan—it is nevertheless a small step towards the actualization of autonomy. Her inability to realize this autonomy is no reflection upon the weakness or ambivalence of the female character, but rather upon the oppressive patriarchal society in which she lives. The same holds true for her lack of female solidarity; individual resistance is the best Zana can do given her circumstances. The act of consciousness evident in the text's representation of imagined autonomy and project to understand the obstructions to this autonomy is validated by the text as nevertheless effective by virtue of its potential. After all, consciousness is the first phase of all political change.

If there is fatalism in Deledda, it is not fatalism like that of Verga's "La lupa," in which the female character is morally corrupt *before* she is then corrupted by economic and sexual circumstances. Rather, in Deledda economic fatalism decidedly determines moral fatalism. Moreover, unlike in Verga, whatever fatalism there is at work in the story is placed in check with the female character's relative autonomy so that even the term "fatalism" becomes questionable. Therefore, can one even use the term "fatalism" at all? In light of this question and others, the need to re-examine Deledda's female protagonists as complex and autonomous characters deserving not only of feminist criticism, but of criticism unprejudiced by "veristic" standards is all the more evident.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>By the same token one might re-evaluate the critical tendency to read Deledda's work within the category of "regionalism" which more often than not acts as a diminutive category that prohibits more original readings of Deledda.

<sup>2</sup>For more on the way others have criticized her language as banal and outdated, see Bice Garavelli's article "La lingua di Grazia Deledda". While Maria

Giocobbe Harder notes Deledda's "non-modernità" (*Grazia Deledda* 114), both her work and Garavelli's ultimately validate Deledda's works. An example of a critic that deems Deledda's work as limited by her psychological "primitivism" is Aldo Borlenghi (Abete *Grazia Deledda* 53-57).

<sup>3</sup>Typical of this kind of traditional—and very problematic—reading are Luigi Falchi's *L'opera di Grazia Deledda*, and Helen Elizabeth Hauri's book, *Fato e religiosità*. Less traditional, but still engaged in reading Deledda's characters as products of a morally fatalistic universe, is Neria De Giovanni's *Religiosità and Fatalismo*.

<sup>4</sup>The same argument might be made for Deledda's contemporaries such as the Sicilian writer Maria Messina, who is also traditionally read as a disciple of Verga. Messina raises many of the same themes as Deledda, such as the socio-economic constraints placed on women in turn-of-the-century Italy.

<sup>5</sup>All translations of "La volpe" are my own.

<sup>6</sup>For information on Deledda's research and writings on Sardinian folklore see Lynn Gunzberg's "Ruralism, Folklore, and Grazia Deledda's Novels". Gunzberg also argues that Regionalism is important to the way one reads Deledda since Deledda's original appeal rests on her regionalist style. Deledda's academic work on folklore attests not only to the degree of sophistication of her use of folklore in the story, but to her complicated manipulation of folklore systems.

<sup>7</sup>Examples of Sardinian proverbs concerning foxes and lambs abound in Salvatore Loi's *Proverbi Sardi*.

<sup>8</sup>As a result Zana resembles other Deleddian female protagonists such as Marianna Sirca (*Marianna Sirca*, 1915) who chooses not to marry in order to preserve her economic independence.

<sup>9</sup>For an example of this argument see Gunzberg (118; 120-1). While the argument that Deledda is unhistorical is often accompanied by a favourable reading of what is seen as the "timeless" qualities of her work, this argument is also used as an implicit criticism of her lack of social and economic interests, especially since Verga (her standard of criticism) is found to be sensitive to socio-economic issues.

<sup>10</sup>As in "La volpe" *Marianna Sirca* and *Cosima* suggest that this "choice", although less than ideal, is perhaps the best way of preserving economic independence. But like "La volpe," the texts ask: at what cost to these characters' mental health is this choice made? Certainly, *Marianna Sirca* and *Cosima* present a more ideal picture of female autonomy in that these female protagonists maintain autonomy outside marriage at least temporarily. Neither Marianna nor Cosima has reached the extreme state of neurosis that Zana has, and therefore seem more in control of themselves, or "padrona di sé", the motto of Marianna. Marianna and Cosima, however, are not in the same financially precarious predicament as Zana. *Marianna Sirca* begins after the question of Marianna's inheritance or dowry has already been resolved: "Marianna Sirca, dopo la morte di un suo ricco zio prete, del quale aveva ereditato il patrimonio, era andata a pas-

sare alcuni giorni in campagna...” [“Marianna Sirca, after the death of a rich uncle of hers, a priest, had gone to spend a few days in the country....”] (1). While neither actually reaches such an extreme state of neurosis as Zana, both do exhibit similar symptoms of anxiety as a result of other issues surrounding their autonomy. The texts suggest that despite the initial edenic period of autonomy, there are problems when these women actually choose to marry. Either they risk losing control over their money (as in Marianna’s case) or their societies inevitably place pressure on them to marry at the risk of becoming a social outcast (in both novels).

<sup>11</sup>The references to Freud’s theory of repression is to be found in numerous works. This footnote, therefore, does not claim to be a complete list of references, but only an example of some works that deal with the issue of anxiety and its symptoms: *Civilization and Its Discontents* 59; 64; 69; 71-72; 78-82; *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety* 23-28; 55; *Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. XIII 64; *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* 348-351.

<sup>12</sup>Since this sense of the oral narrative is neglected in most English translations of the short story, I have provided my own translation of this particular passage.

<sup>13</sup>In the article “Woman as Outlaw”, Susan Briziarelli suggests using Jameson’s theory to read Deledda’s characters’ political intimations.

<sup>14</sup>The passage of interest is the following: “Caduti i tabú, o attenuati comunque, in una dimensione storica non più rigida, isolata, compatta, come quella della Sardegna primitiva e arcaica, le restrizioni, gli eroici sacrifici a cui i personaggi continuano a sottoporsi non possono apparire che obbedienza assurda a una legge interna forzatamente costrittiva, riformulazione di una psicosi nervosa, di una radicalizzazione introiettata, ineliminabile ormai, di un divieto schematizzato e divenuto inscindibile struttura della mente....Il tabú, come manifestazione tipica, precisa, di una cultura primitiva che ha cessato da tempo la sua funzione è divenuto un retaggio mnemonico, una mera ritualità della psiche, il sintomo di una fissazione, quasi si fosse creata una sorta di malattia del tabú” (*Grazia Deledda* 141).

<sup>15</sup>The text calls attention to the doctor’s position as “outsider” when the doctor speaks to Jacu in the local dialect and Jacu responds in Italian so as to purposefully marginalize him (214).

<sup>16</sup>See Neria De Giovanni’s *Come leggere Canne al Vento* for more information on this topic (8). These plots of land or “tancas” used to belong to the “re pastori” and were then bought by the bourgeois industrial colonizers that came to the island.

<sup>17</sup>Giacobbe Harder describes the “ricco pastore che fa una vita rude ma ha bestime, terre, e denaro” (9-10).

<sup>18</sup>Giacobbe Harder notes that the Sardinian term “zustissia” does not mean “giustizia” as one might think, but the exact opposite. “Zustissia” is an ironic term that refers to the repressive organization of the law from outside (i.e. colonialism). Instead “giustizia” in the Sardinian dialect would be expressed as “su zustu” (33-34).

<sup>19</sup>While colonialism in Sardinian had taken place for centuries (in both economic and administrative forms) by 1912 (the year of publication of “*La volpe*”), it is believed that the modern form of “banditismo” did not arise until mid-18th century. In 1868 the famous “*Su connottu*” revolt took place which was a kind of public expression of economic and social “malessere” on the part of the local peoples. Moreover, at the turn of the century many articles and books were published on the phenomenon of “banditismo” in Sardinia. About the same time various journals, such as *L’Unione Sarda* and *La Nuova Sardegna*, were founded and devoted to these contemporary political issues. Therefore, while it seems that the topic of economic and political injustice in Sardinia (and the resulting resistance in the form of “banditismo” and outright revolt) was already a publicly debated issue in 1912 Italy, I would venture to say that public consciousness and discussion of female independence (especially in rural areas such as Nuoro, Sardinia) were not as common and/or widely socially acceptable—especially in the form of such a violent allegory as Deledda’s in which a single woman plans murder in order to maintain independence. Therefore, while there was a “resistance” of its own coming into being on the proto-feminist front, it was not that of a violent and physically devious resistance as was the resistance happening on the anti-colonial front (in the form of banditry and revolt), and would therefore almost certainly be more shocking if represented through an engendered appeal. For more information on the political situation at the time of the publication of Deledda’s works see Neria De Giovanni’s *Come leggere Canne al Vento* and Maria Giacobbe Harder’s *Grazia Deledda*.

<sup>20</sup>In *Grazia Deledda*, Giacobbe Harder speaks of the written nature of the local dialect and “codice arcaico non scritto ma ben articolato e regolato da precise norme giuridiche.” She notes that at the heart of this unwritten code (“questo linguaggio allusivo”) lies a kind of “sentenziosità” (32).

<sup>21</sup>For a discussion of Deledda’s heroines as “rebels” see Briziarelli (27-31). Briziarelli looks at “banditismo” in *Cosima* and *La chiesa della solitudine*. Marianna Sirca also engages the phenomenon of “banditismo” in the love affair between Marianna and the bandit Simone Sole.

<sup>22</sup>See Giacobbe Harder’s reference to “bandits of honor”: “... ‘banditi d’onore’ si fa difensore contro l’inguistizia in quel contesto e nei casi specifici della sua amministrazione dell’*altra* legge, quella imposta, che non sa proteggerlo, anzi non lo rispetta, ferendolo spesso proprio nella sua così profonda esigenza e netta concezione del giusto e dell’inguistito” (33).

<sup>23</sup>It is important to point out that Freud’s theory of repression is not meant to excuse an individual from acts such as murder, but rather to understand the factors that may have caused it. I am simply using Freud’s theory of repression to understand Zana’s controversial behaviour, and not to suggest any moral judgement on Deledda’s part.

<sup>24</sup>Maria Messina also presents this same problem of the lack of female solidarity in the individual woman’s project for autonomy. Yet, like Deledda, she encourages us to consider that perhaps it is the only solution for any autonomy given the socio-economic circumstances.

<sup>25</sup>The text suggests that as an unmarried woman, Zana is somewhat of an outcast (as we see in her lack of interaction with the other women at the "tosatura"). On the other hand, when she flirts with the doctor, she is condemned by the male characters.

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CRISTINA MAZZONI

BRAIDING MYSTICISM, LITERATURE, THEORY:  
THE CASE OF MARGARET MAZZANTINI'S  
*NON TI MUOVERE*

There have probably been braids for as long as there has been long hair. And one can also braid things other than hair, of course—food being a popular braiding item: we have all seen braided bread, mozzarella, garlic, onions, hot peppers... In most cases, braiding is an activity associated with women and girls: my five-year-old daughter knows how to braid already, my husband learned a couple of years ago, my nine-year-old son wants nothing to do with it. The following essay mimicks the movements of a three-stranded braid (the most popular of all braids), as I grab and braid strand-like paragraphs of uneven lengths devoted to three discourses: mysticism, literature, theory. The result is sometimes a tight braid, sometimes a looser one: by being braided rather than woven, mystical, literary, and theoretical discourses, until the tassel ends of the braid, at least, preserve their integrity even as their appearance is transformed.

The first strand asks a question about the intersection between mysticism and literature: might the intersection of maternity and spirituality in a largely secular novel point to the continued significance of mystical modes of life-writing for contemporary writing projects (and perhaps life projects as well)?

When I first read Margaret Mazzantini's *Non ti muovere* (2001) I loved it as a fun book, a comfortable book, the kind I sometimes enjoy at night after the kids are in bed and homework has been graded. But upon my second reading I also realized that in this book my two research interests—maternity and mysticism—came together in an uneven and compelling way. Read this way, the book engaged me more provocatively, for example, by violating some of the rules I expect fun books to follow.

Turning to theory: Roland Barthes has explained well in *The Pleasure of the Text* the useful distinction between the pleasure afforded by the readerly text—comfortable and reassuring—with the *jouissance* or bliss of the writerly text—disconcerting, unsettling of the reader's linguistic and cultural assumptions (25-6).

What in mystical *jouissance* can bind a saint's text to a novel? One might start with the connection between language and its other: the relation of mysticism with silence *and* that, silence *as* that which exceeds language, or the attempt on the part of mystical language to capture the inefable: "C'è un indicibile assoluto e c'è una difficoltà storicamente determinata a dire la propria esperienza," writes in *L'ordine simbolico della madre* feminist theorist Luisa Muraro, who has found in women's mystical writings a genealogy for her own more secular philosophical enterprise. "Ma i due indicibili," she continues, "che in teoria possiamo distinguere, alla singola possono risultare non separabili. O lei può non voler separarli, come presentendo nella sua ordinaria difficoltà a dire la prefigurazione dell'assolutamente indicibile" (32-3). Or, as a theologian puts it, "to speak of God we must employ an extravagant *modus loquendi* that dismantles our referential pretensions even as it registers the pressure of that to which it cannot refer" (Bauerschmidt 350). This is the tension of the mystical enterprise: to speak of the unspeakable, to push against that opacity that marks the limits of language.

The narrative of *Non ti muovere* engages verbal limits and the ability of language to represent the other: a woman author writes of a male narrator who attempts to access female subjectivity as sacred space through, for example, transgressive sexual practices, abortion as self-abnegation, medical scrutiny. At the same time the novel is a traditional first-person account of an organizing narrative "I," an account in which the meaning of life is found in death—although the centrality of maternity disrupts this emphasis on mortality. As this is a very recent novel, let me say a few words about the plot. *Non ti muovere* is told in the first person by Timoteo, or Timo, a surgeon who is addressing his fifteen-year-old daughter, Angela. They are both in the hospital, his hospital, where Angela is undergoing brain surgery following a *motorino* accident (like so many teenagers, she had neglected to fasten her helmet). As he waits outside the O.R. while his colleague operates, Timo "tells" Angela about his love affair with an ugly, vulgar, lower-class woman named Italia—a woman unlike Angela's mother, Elsa, the narrator's beautiful, elegant, and successful journalist wife. The love affair ends with Italia's death from the delayed consequences of a botched abortion the day after Angela's birth. In spite of a male narrator professionally infected by the touch of death, the maternal experience is central to the novel. Throughout, another hidden theme surfaces regularly: the sanctification of Italia, who is represented more and more, as the novel progresses, with the attributes of a contemporary saint whose multiple failures ultimately guarantee her ability to intercede.

The abandonment of the “I”—tied to issues of subjectivity and apophysis, of silence and linguistic transgression—is a *topos* in mystical writings, embraced by many mystics and effectively theorized by twentieth-century French activist and mystic Simone Weil in one of her *Notebooks*: “We possess nothing in this world—for chance may deprive us of everything—except the power to say ‘I.’ It is that which has to be offered up to God, that is to say, destroyed. The destruction of the ‘I’ is the one and only free act that lies open to us” (2:337). This abdication of power, and ultimately of the power to be, is paradoxically what confers power to the saint: the self-renunciation of the saintly life, epitomized in the dissolution of mystical union, is central to the hagiographic project (Wyschogrod, 58).

The sanctification of Italia in Mazzantini’s novel, contingent on her dissolution, her abdication of the power to be, as well as on her radical altruism, is a way of coming to terms with suffering—of all the characters—and death—of Italia and possibly of Angela. A poor, ugly, vulgar, thirty-something woman becomes a saint of sorts through some of the narrative strategies employed by hagiographic and particularly mystical accounts: the dualism of action and contemplation, the exchange of one’s self and of one’s heart, the practices of selflessness and redemptive suffering, the processes of abjection and of union. In this book, for example, unbuttoning a blouse is like praying the rosary: “Cominciò a sbottinarsi la camicia, rapidi i bottoni uscivano dalle asole di lurex, correvarono sotto le sue dita come un rosario.” Italia’s house is like a church: “il caminetto contro il muro. Sembrava un altare smesso. Perché nel buio la casa aveva una sua sacralità” (83); and later in the novel Timo says that “la casa ora mi ricordava una di quelle chiese che s’incontrano nelle località di mare. Chiese moderne, senza affreschi, con un Gesù di gesso e fiori fasulli in un vaso senz’acqua” (96).<sup>1</sup> Finally, Italia is a religious figure: when Timo sees her in the rain after a long separation, crying and soaking wet, Italia—who, unlike the other characters in the novel, is a believer—“sembra una santa” (226), when she is sick Italia “sembrava una suora senza velo” (255: earlier in the novel Timo had already said about Italia: “era senza età, come una suora,” 96), when she is lying dead in her coffin she is “una santa burina da portare in processione” (276). When Italia is getting ready to leave her house forever, “va a prendersi la sua giacca di mucillagine che è larga sul divano, con le maniche aperte come un crocifisso in attesa delle sue braccia” (248)—she is, indeed, about to embark on her last journey, from which she will not return alive. The sanctification of Italia allows Timo, a self-proclaimed atheist, to turn to her for intercession: it is to Italia that he prays for his daughter’s life. The maternal mediates between heaven and earth, between sainthood and survival. In the narrator’s perception, Italia dies when their

aborted child comes for her: as soon as she dies, Timo recalls, “D’istinto mi voltai a cercarla verso l’alto. Allora lo vidi, Angela, vidi nostro figlio. Il suo volto per un attimo mi apparve lassù. Non era bello, aveva un muso gracile e aspro come quello di sua madre. Quel piccolo figlio di puttana se l’era venuta a prendere” (269). So also when Timo’s daughter is in the operating room and her mother is on the plane *en route* to the hospital (she was on her way to London for an interview at the time of the accident), first Timo wonders if his vision of Italia represents Angela’s impending death (“Davvero sei venuta a riprendermela?” 289), then he asks Italia to intercede maternally on Angela’s—and on her mother’s—behalf. He describes his wife on the plane: “Sta guardando una nuvola, sta guardando sua figlia. Taglia quella nuvola, Italia, tagliala come una cicogna. Restituiscemi Angela” (290). Like a stork, Italia can bring birth. Thanks to her own death, Italia can give life. She is the patron saint of motherhood by contrast, because she was altruistically able to give up her own maternity for the sake of Elsa’s, to destroy part of herself so that her lover’s daughter may have a normal existence. For in contrast with Elsa’s practical successes and no-nonsense approach to work and family (“Tua madre è sempre in terra, anche quando è in cielo,” is how Timo describes Elsa’s behaviour on the plane, 18), Italia is a contemplative, who accomplishes nothing of value, who is always waiting. She lives for Timo and stops living when he is no longer hers. More pointedly, the two women’s pregnancies are represented as irreconcilable opposites, one leading to life and the other to death—of both mother and child, a son. The *mise-en-abîme* continues with the very practice of abortion—problematically represented as the death of a child, of a person. Thus, Italia and Timo are like beaten up parents who have lost a child: “due amici bastonati dallo stesso bastone. O forse come genitori che hanno perso un figlio” (197). Italia does not trust hospitals, or more precisely she is alienated from science, medicine, perhaps knowledge itself, and chooses to go to her friends the gypsies, whose camp is adjacent to her little house, to have her ultimately deadly abortion. Clearly, however, one can hardly speak of a free choice: Italia wants her child, but her illegitimate, atopic position (or, instead, her generosity) prevents her from having her wish: again, she is portrayed with the altruism of a saint, she destroys part of herself in order that her beloved’s life may remain whole. Her socially marginal yet generous sainthood, in a novel of comfortable and self-absorbed bourgeois characters, is the signifier of Italia’s difference—the epistemological privilege she derives from her position as outsider.<sup>2</sup>

To turn again to the theoretical strand, here are two quotations from nomadic feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti. One: “The ethics of sexual difference [Braidotti is discussing the work of Luce Irigaray] aims at find-

ing and enacting enabling representations of a new female humanity and a female sense of the divine." (*Nomadic Subjects*, 133). Two: "Woman as a sign of difference is monstrous" (*Nomadic Subjects*, 81). Both quotations, although found in separate and different chapters—one engaging a possible feminist transcendence, the other remaining at the immanent level of bodily monstrosity—ask the question of embodied female subjectivity. The second quotation explicitly engages the fact that difference, pure difference, is unbearable to the logic of the One, it deconstructs representation itself, it elicits simultaneously fascination and horror. Braidotti notes that the morphological dubiousness of the female body—for it is on the body that subjectivity remains founded—is evidenced in its ability to change shape (in childbearing), and thus in its proximity to the monster: mothers and monsters are both "capable of defeating the notion of *fixed bodily form*, of visible, recognizable, clear, and distinct shapes as that which marks the contours of the body" (80).

The monstrosity of the female body, its attraction and repulsion, is related to the horror of abjection privileged by many mystics—the abjection evident when Angela of Foligno eucharistically drinks the water in which she had washed a leper's scabs (Mazzoni, 53); or when Catherine of Genova eats lice, "learning to handle them as if they were pearls" (Catherine of Genova, 131).

Abjection is an activity both Italia and Timo embrace. Italia cuts her lover's toenails and keeps them in a velvet pouch for jewels—and Timo will eventually place these abject jewels in her hands when she is buried, toenail clippings instead of a rosary: "Per caso, rimestando nella sua valigia, avevo trovato la sacchetta da gioielli dove lei aveva conservato le mie unghie tagliate. Ce l'avevo in tasca, era una sacchetta floscia di velluto color cammello, gliela nascosi tra le mani. *Ecco, tieni i tuoi gioielli, Italia, queste schegge ingiallite diventeranno sabbia insieme a te*" (272, Mazzantini's emphasis; see also 106, 210). Timo's abjection is more pervasive, it is the abjection of a rich and successful man who rapes a woman he finds ugly and even, at times, repulsive, in a house that makes him feel "un misterioso piacere sentendo che tutto intorno a me era davvero squallido" (36), who relishes his lover's smell of beast, childbirth, and poverty (227), who eats dirt at Italia's funeral: "Cercavo un gesto per salutarla," he remembers, "e non trovai di meglio che smerdarmi la bocca" (287).

Drawing from the work of anthropologist Mary Douglas, Julia Kristeva has analyzed the practice of abjection and its ultimate relation to the mother's body in her book *Powers of Horror*: the maternal gives life and assures death, and as such it is both holy and soiled, attractive and repul-

sive. The abject—that which is ambiguous, neither alive nor dead—signifies the relation with the mother's body before the latter becomes an object. It is that from which one must separate in order to attain subjectivity, that which one must reject in order to avoid dissolving into the mother.<sup>3</sup> Otherness, in Kristeva's work—both the otherness within us and the otherness outside of us—is essential in our becoming ourselves. For example, the maternal subject, for Kristeva, is a model of ethics, or “herethics,” because it embodies alterity within—as she explains at length in “*Stabat Mater*.” Difference is fundamental to ethics. As Michelle Boulous Walker puts it, Kristeva's discussion of the abject “moves us away from a silence/language opposition toward an understanding of the rather more complex relation between the logos and its other;” silence, that is, can be thought of as “a metaphor for the otherness that inhabits the logos, an otherness that is anything but quiet” (99). I would go on to say that the abject, by destabilizing the opposition between silence and the word, can become one way of speaking the unspeakable, of representing the unrepresentable.

Abjection can be the prism through which bodily wastes appear as precious jewels, markers of closeness and distance, oneness and difference, humanity and the divine.

Through and despite its sentimental surface, *Non ti muovere* tackles the difficult question of sanctity today, of the holiness of the other, and of the lessons of difference. In abjection, as in union and exchange, the subject's desire is excessive. Timo and Italia, narrator and narrative matter, man and woman, professional and proletarian, rich and poor... These opposites are bridged by a mystical exchange whose pleasure is lined with the abject.<sup>4</sup> Their lovemaking follows Italia's pattern, not Timo's—in spite of his initial rape. The two become one, but according to her model, not his: “Lei faceva l'amore così, non io. Mi aveva tirato dalla sua parte” (59). And later as Timo visits her house in Italia's absence, he desires to be her: “Volevo essere lei per sentire l'effetto che io provocavo nella sua carne.” This desire to be the other leads Timo to masturbate, to become object and subject of pleasure at once, with the effect that “Il piacere si allargò nella pancia tiepido e profondo, entrò nelle spalle, nella gola. Proprio come il piacere di una donna” (83). Timo and Italia also fantasize being physically contained within each other: first Timo imagines entering her belly button with his whole body, “volevo esser nel suo ventre” (156), and shortly thereafter, when Timo wants to know the place where Italia was before meeting him, shes says “‘Stavo qui dentro,’ mi toccò la pancia” (157). Another time, as Timo and Italia embrace, he experiences the exchange of his heart with his lover's: “Sono un medico, so riconoscere le pulsazioni del mio

cuore, sempre, anche quando non voglio. Te lo giuro, Angela, era di Italia il cuore che batteva dentro di me" (125).<sup>5</sup>

Does the exchange of self, of language, of heart, emphasize union or difference? Does it claim unity in love, the dissolution of the self in the other, or does it painfully show the impossibility of such unity, the irreducible otherness of the other? Exchanges of the self and mystical unions highlight the issues of subjectivity and alterity, of sameness and difference: For how stable can a subject be if it can get lost in the other? Or, conversely, how can I join the other if true union and the overcoming of alterity are impossible? And, what is the role of that other in my coming into subjecthood and, particularly, in my becoming an ethical subject? Otherness and alterity are of course central to the discussion of sexual difference. Feminist theorists such as Adriana Cavarero and Luce Irigaray, perhaps most notably, have noted the double alterity of women, their alterity with respect to language and to being itself. In Cavarero's words, "la donna è portatrice di una doppia alterità: essa è l'altra assimilata nel linguaggio (io, soggetto universale parlante, che si specifica in maschio e femmina, ciascuno dei quali è l'altro dell'altro, ambedue compresi—previsti!—dall'io), essa è però anche l'Altra, una esistente alla cui interezza appartiene costitutivamente la differenza sessuale" ("Per una teoria della differenza sessuale," 62). Yet the elaboration of sexual difference may ultimately conflict with the practice of mystical exchange: "Il pensiero della differenza sessuale, riconoscendo il duale originario come un intranscendibile presupposto, esclude una logica di assimilazione all'Altro," writes Cavarero ("Per una teoria," 78). Are sexual difference and mystical union contradictory then? At one level, perhaps, the level of the logic of the One. But in mystical union and mystical exchange the other is recognized, acknowledged, thought out, as the confines of the (illusively unified) self are ecstatically transgressed. So that the effect of ecstatic union is not only a dissolution of the self in the other, but also, more radically, a search for the other—both outside of and inside oneself—that other without whom the self cannot be an ethical self, that other whose existence founds our very subjectivity as ethical beings. Ecstatic union, mystical exchange, shake the ultimate oneness of the binary economy of the patriarchal symbolic order, the hierarchical duality of subject and object, reason and passion, logos and corporeality, and of course male and female. Since in this economy true alterity is an illusion—because clearly the two sexes do not both have the same power of self-representation—binary economy, as Luce Irigaray has discussed, is founded on the logic of the same, the logic of the mirror or speculum; it has been called homosexual in the sense that only one sex, the male sex, is its subject. In mystical exchange maleness and femaleness (God

and mystic, lover and beloved) are (at times self-consciously) performed (to evoke Judith Butler's concept), they intersect, blend, move each other in ecstatic ways that disrupt sameness and binary logic by questioning patriarchal conceptions of otherness and subjectivity and of the fixity of sex and gender.

Hagiography is a narrative constructed in such a way as to confirm the saint's holiness. A hagiography carries an imperative, it conveys moral force. In her book *Saints and Postmodernism*, Edith Wyschogrod suggests that we look at hagiography as "a proto-novelistic discourse" subject to four criteria: narrativity (its discursive form), corporeality (the alternation of pain and its suspension in the saint's life), textuality (the materiality of writing, with all its instability), and historicality (the sense of historical veracity needed to generate moral practices in the reader). Narrative, corporeal, textual, and historical, the saintly life can have meaning only if it is able to communicate a binding moral value to its readers. "The saintly body," Wyschogrod argues, "acts as a signifier, as a carnal general that condenses and channels meaning, a signifier that expresses extremes of love, compassion, and generosity. In their disclosure of what is morally possible, saintly bodies 'fill' the discursive plane of ethics" (52).

As mystical union is figured in the heart, so also a bodily metonymy may allow us to observe the formation of the self in *Non ti muovere*. Even as it presents bodies that are palpably material—surgical bodies, sexual bodies, maternal and filial bodies—*Non ti muovere* shows the uncontrollability of the body by its own anatomy, its pains and pleasures, its reproductive ability.<sup>6</sup> Three types of bodies appear in this novel: the surgical body as the body of science, of thought, of knowledge; the sexual body as the body of affects, of desire; the maternal-daughterly body as the body of connections, of social bonds (Italia, by the way, is the only one in the novel to incarnate all three bodies: she is Timo's lover, the mother of their child, his surgical patient; Elsa is mother and lover but not surgical patient, and Angela is daughter and surgical patient but not a lover). Nevertheless Mazzantini's bodies—surgical, sexual, maternal-daughterly—escape the boundaries to which each of their inscriptions (and inscribing functions: since these bodies produce as well as being produced) would confine them. Childbirth and abortion, in spite of their apparent contradiction, both bring about life as well as death, they signify natality as well as mortality; and the reproductive body is the site of the generation of meaning, yes, but of an ambiguous meaning at best—in a world where abortion kills and teenagers die.

The multiple connections between birth and death evoke the philo-

sophical concept of natality as the category through which we become who we are—and I am referring to Hannah Arendt's elaboration of natality filtered through Adriana Cavarero's reading. Natality rather than mortality should be our privileged philosophical category, for it is through birth—a social event, unlike death—that we become *who* (and not *what*) we are. In Kristeva's words, Arendt "bequeathed to us a modern version of the Judeo-Christian affection for the love of life through her constant drumbeat of the 'miracle of birth' that combines the risks of beginning and the freedom of men [sic] to love one another, to think, and to judge." (*Hannah Arendt*, 46). In Cavarero's elaboration, death "diventa il luogo emblematico della desensibilizzazione, cioè il luogo del distacco dal sensibile, e assume perciò una valenza positiva ed 'esemplare' per il filosofare, nella misura in cui questo è già un esercizio che distacca la mente dal corpo e dall'esperienza sensibile. Il filosofo, infatti, vivendo di solo pensiero, anticipa la morte, e, quando la morte viene, al pari di Socrate, l'accoglie come una liberazione dal mondo ingannevole e perturbante delle apparenze cui il corpo è necessariamente ancorato." Natality, on the other hand, "annuncia il radicarsi degli uomini nella singolarità del cominciamento. In altri termini chi nasce è 'nuovo' nel significato reale del termine: è una singolarità fattuale e imprevedibile che appare nel mondo e vi appartiene. Con lui un nuovo 'chi' comincia essendo *del* mondo, e stando nel mondo insieme, in interrelazione, ad altri 'chi,' parimenti nuovi e comincianti" ("Dire la nascita," 111-112). We are natals rather than mortals, uniquely born of a woman: if the philosophical emphasis on death produces a division between thought and body (with the devaluation of the latter), birth roots the human being in the other. But this other is always a woman—hence the devaluation of natality in philosophy, according to Cavarero: "Proprio per questo può decidere—ha deciso—di non misurare la condizione umana nella sessuazione femminile dell'origine dalla quale il suo sesso è appunto escluso, e di volgere perciò lo sguardo altrove: ossia in quello scomparire, ben conosciuto dall'*homo necans*, dalla cui prospettiva il nascere da madre finisce col mostrarsi come un apparire colpevolmente destinato alla sparizione, un nascere da donna che corre verso la morte. Così è la morte a farsi misura, e il corpo a sopportare l'odissea del caduto" (Cavarero, "Dire la nascita," 114-115).

Mazzantini's book, like Penelope in Cavarero's interpretation, weaves back together what philosophy had undone: birth and death.<sup>7</sup> When her mother looks at Angela in the intensive care unit after the operation, Timo tells his daughter about Elsa: "Sai cos'è, con quella faccia da nonna? È una madre che guarda attraverso il vetro di una nursery. È esattamente così.

Una madre in vestaglia, con il seno dolorante di latte, che guarda il suo neonato, la sua scimmia rossa. Ha quegli occhi lì, di una con la pancia floscia e vuota che spia la carne che è uscita da lei" (293). Can birth, rather than death, as Walter Benjamin would have it, be the sanction of storytelling, Mazzantini's novel seems to ask?<sup>28</sup> Or will Angela's story remain untold unless she dies?

So here is the end of the braid, the tassel mixing the three strands of mysticism, literature, and theory. The tie for my braid? A quotation from Hélène Cixous: "There is a difference between what makes things move and what stops them; it is what moves things that changes them" (Cixous and Clément, 157).

"Non ti muovere": this phrase appears several times in the course of the book. It can refer to simple movements of the body (Italia says it to Timo who is getting up to help her clear the table, 91, Timo says it to Italia when she is about to conceal her ugly naked body, 106, and when he sees her in the rain after a long separation, 225), as well as to the potentially deadly movements of the spirit: Timo says "Non ti muovere" to Angela at the very beginning of the novel to ask her to stay—to stay alive, that is (20), and also to Italia right after she dies; this last "Non ti muovere" is italicized (269), perhaps because it is a speech act which the speaker, unable to bring the dead back to life, is not qualified to make. Later the same command is repeated to Italia's spirit, in fear that she has come to take Angela away with her (289). Three pages from the end of the book, Timo says "Non ti muovere" to Angela, as he connects her to the respirator—but Angela's response is a life-affirming refusal of immobility: "Hai uno strano singhiozzo nel petto. Ti riattacco al respiratore, non ti muovere. Invece ti muovi. Mi stringi la mano" (291). So also, right before dying, Italia's last word is "Portami. E non mi disse dove" (269)—contradicting the imperative of "Non ti muovere."

Let me tie the braid again: "There is a difference between what makes things move and what stops them; it is what moves things that changes them."

There is one instance—and with this I will conclude—when "Non ti muovere" is spoken twice within two lines, and it is when Timo has driven Italia to the private clinic where his best friend Manlio, a well-known ob-gyn, is supposed to perform the abortion (though this does not happen, and she goes to the gypsies for it). As he watches her cross the gravel walkway from his car, Timo sees Italia trip and fall—contrary to his expectations, for she always looks precarious when she walks: "Invece cade, un ultimo passo e si accascia di botto. Riacchiappa la borsa, ma non si alza,

resta lì accovacciata in terra. Non si volta, è convinta che io sia già andato via. *Non ti muovere*, dico, senza sapere quello che dico. E forse lei sa che ci sono. *Non ti muovere*. Perché ora mi sembra che quella parte di lei che mancava l'abbia raggiunta, come un brandello di stracci alati le sta coprendo la groppa" (150). At this point Italia's body is silently suspended between maternity (she is pregnant), medicine (she is about to enter the clinic), and sexuality (we see her through her lover's eyes). If she could speak, she might address the ethics of her marginal position, the creativity of her self-abdication, the dissolution in and of her quest for union. But a fourth dimension, "quella parte di lei che mancava," is joining all this in the scene I just described. It is something which can be seen only in the fall into abjection, in the loss of self through altruism, in the life-giving communion with the Other. I would like to suggest that this missing part is the sacred, the spirit, the holy, that which Italia points to throughout the novel, that which will finally give her wings—or at least "un brandello di stracci alati."

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Belden Lane writes that "This curious phenomenon of the sacred place as ostensibly unexceptional can be seen to cut across all periods and cultures . . . . Repeatedly, in the economy of salvation, what is almost prosaic and commonplace is chosen as the site of divine blessing" (25).

<sup>2</sup>More on the epistemological privileges of marginality can be read in Terdiman, "The Marginality of Michel de Certeau."

<sup>3</sup>This is a disturbing aspect of Kristeva's theory: that subjectivity must be attained through the hostile exclusion of the mother, of the other—the point that Luisa Muraro seeks to undo in *L'ordine simbolico della madre*: "Anche Kristeva sembra pensare che l'indipendenza simbolica, il comune saper parlare, si paghi necessariamente con la perdita del punto di vista dell'antica relazione con la madre. In contrasto con lei, io affermo che l'ordine simbolico comincia a stabilirsi necessariamente (o non si stabilirà mai) nella relazione con la madre e che il 'taglio' che ci separa da questa non risponde a una necessità di ordine simbolico" (44).

<sup>4</sup>There are oxymorons in this novel as in mystical texts: Italia is "una bambina appena invecchiata" whom Timo rapes "perché l'ho amata subito e non volevo amarla, l'ho fatto per ucciderla e volevo salvarla" (129).

<sup>5</sup>The mystical exchange of the heart has been described by Catherine of Siena, Veronica Giuliani, and especially by Gemma Galgani: "In these instants, my

heart and the heart of Jesus are one single thing" (Rudolph Bell and Cristina Mazzoni, 207).

<sup>6</sup>In thinking about the body, I found especially helpful Rosi Braidotti's discussion in *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*.

<sup>7</sup>"Penelope tangles and holds together what philosophy wants to separate. She brings back the act of thinking to a life marked by birth and death" (Cavarero, *In Spite of Plato*, 29).

<sup>8</sup>"Death," in Walter Benjamin's dictum, "is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death." Thus, a character's story becomes transmissible at the moment of her death and, to quote from Benjamin again, "the meaning of [her] life is revealed only in [her] death" (151, 156).

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GRAZIA SOTIS

## PER UNA RILETTURA DI GOZZANO

È interessante proporre un poeta a distanza di cento anni in un momento in cui vige il concetto di globalizzazione letteraria e stilistica. Il saggio di Flaminio Di Biagi su Guido Gozzano *Sotto l'arco di Tito: le "Farfalle" di Gozzano* (Trento: La Finestra, 1999) è un esempio di studio su uno scrittore volto al recupero della propria tradizione e, nello stesso tempo, aperto alle novità poetiche di altri paesi, in questo caso soprattutto della Francia e dell'India. Il Gozzano importa, ma non subisce il fascino straniero perché lo rielabora in un contesto tutto italiano. Le espressioni ed immagini esotiche vengono acclimataate nella sua Torino. La simmetria, l'austerità e la linearità di Gozzano rappresentano la base su cui poggia la sua creatività artistica, la sua divertita insofferenza alle nuove mode letterarie.

Il Di Biagi, anche lui con tono divertito, è intento al recupero di un Gozzano ironico. Non a caso il titolo del lavoro del critico è indice di un atteggiamento di persona che guarda da lontano e che nel frattempo "si lima le unghie": "con il detto 'cercar farfalle sotto l'arco di Tito' s'intende l'occuparsi di inezie e meschinità in circostanze importanti o trascurare ciò che davvero conta per star dietro a dettagli secondari e risibili" (Di Biagi, p. 91). Assistiamo a un interessante processo di simbiosi fra il critico e il poeta; fra i due si instaura una complicità e comprensione profonda che aiuta il lettore e lo studioso ad apprezzare l'opera sia in versi sia in prosa di uno scrittore che ha bruciato i suoi tempi, cioè che è riuscito a includere, o inglobare, tutto ciò che c'era da assimilare, con la maturità di un grande che sfortunatamente è vissuto solo trentatré anni (1883-1916).

Dei quattro capitoli che formano il volume del Di Biagi, nota degna di attenzione sono anche le illustrazioni che precedono ognuno di essi. Così facendo il critico stabilisce un rapporto interdisciplinare fra le arti visive e la letteratura. Con esse il Di Biagi sintetizza visualmente il contenuto di ogni capitolo, riprendendo il modello della visualità pittorica tipica dello stile Liberty. Tuttavia è curioso notare che Gozzano "sembra risentire di una sorta di sovraesposizione e, laddove parla specificamente del Liberty, pare sempre rifiutarlo" (p. 113). La visualità è anche dovuta al

fatto che Gozzano era interessato al cinema, e questo interesse potrebbe essere già un sintomo di uno scrittore insofferente ai vecchi modelli espressivi del mondo letterario.

Se prendiamo ad esempio l'illustrazione che precede il primo capitolo, chiaramente si nota un processo sinottico di tutto il contenuto. C'è una propensione al mondo fiabesco e ai "domini del fantastico" (p. 23): questo potrebbe essere interpretato come elemento esotico; vige un linguaggio moderno, quindi una tendenza a una poesia antilirica, con la creazione di un metalinguaggio o metapoesia. È presente l'ironia di Gozzano in un gioco di recita ripetuta e falsificata, anzi "lì —la poesia— trova la propria compiuta dimensione" (p. 35). Ancora in questa illustrazione trova riscontro la definizione di Sanguineti della letteratura come sogno e le grandi industrie elettriche, automobilistiche, cinematografiche, tessili.

L'illustrazione del primo capitolo, quindi, esprime i temi della tesi (malattia, morte), dell'ironia (l'autodefinirsi "mentecatto" da parte dello stesso Gozzano), dell'importanza di riscatto della letteratura, con la sua dimensione fiabesca. Gozzano esprime lo stato di salute della poesia italiana e i suoi rapporti con la cultura d'oltralpe, soprattutto quella francese; il disagio di un atteggiamento provinciale e, di conseguenza, il suo divertito approdo all'ironia verso una forma poetica più forte e ardita. La nuova poesia è quella europea, ma anche italiana, che subisce il fascino sperimentale di Carducci, Pascoli e D'Annunzio intenti a una scrittura di poesia prosastica che si presenti più vigorosa. Ciò è già riscontrabile nello stile di Gerald M. Hopkins con il suo "sprung rhythm", o di Walt Whitman: una poesia aperta, infinita nelle sue soluzioni ritmiche ed iconiche.

L'atteggiamento di Gozzano, forse dettato dal milieo di una Torino borghese e, se visto in rapporto agli altri paesi, forse provinciale, se da un lato ha il pregio di asserire l'importanza della direzione in cui si muove la poesia italiana, dall'altro mostra l'atteggiamento di un poeta che si diletta a voler essere timidamente diverso e che si orienta verso un mondo culturalmente più "decadente", più ricettivo a un sonno intellettuale, come del resto "I mangiatori di Loto" ("The Lotus Eaters") di Lord Tennyson avevano già anticipato fino alla rassegnazione dello stesso poeta che sta per giungere alla sua fine, "Crossing the Bar."

L'Oriente e l'India con i loro colori e profumi sono espressioni di una nuova esoticità poetica e sembrano essere più consoni alla personalità di Gozzano che si crogiola in un ambiente protetto di una Torino bene. L'invito alla fiaba e al sogno è una dimensione metafisica della realtà che viene interpretata con il tono dimesso di chi sa che sta per avvicinarsi al traguardo della propria vita. Il Di Biagi, nella scelta dell'illustrazione al primo

capitolo del volume, coglie molto bene questo aspetto della personalità gozzaniana: una farfalla (poesia, creatività) che si appoggia sul capo del poeta; ad essa fa riscontro un'altra, che si manifesta in tutta la sua spettralità di morte, e ancora un'altra farfalla che attraversa “la sbarra” tennysoniana. Questo è nella parte superiore dell’illustrazione. Nella parte inferiore regna l’espressione serena di un poeta che riesce a distaccarsi e a rifugiarsi nel mondo fiabesco, nella sua fanciullezza (presente in un cavallo a dondolo) e forse, perché no, in un libro di fiabe, visto l’interesse che lo stesso Gozzano ha avuto per esse.

Immagine di una farfalla bambina in una cesta: ed è così che il Di Biagi introduce il secondo capitolo, dove il critico mette in evidenza l’importanza delle fiabe, del viaggio in India compiuto da Gozzano, e l’interesse che l’autore ha per la prosa, opera per la quale lo scrittore è meno conosciuto, e che il testo di critica ha il merito di mettere in risalto. La prosa fa parte dell’ultimo Gozzano, ed essa include pure i lavori per l’allora nascente industria cinematografica, per la quale egli ha scritto la sceneggiatura di *San Francesco*.

Il ricostruire ricordi e appunti dell’India, “il rito dell’evocazione”, sembrano riproporre il wordsworthiano “recollected experiences in tranquillity” (emozione rivissuta in tranquillità) dove interprete incontrastata è la memoria reitinerante. L’India non può far a meno di ricordare al lettore le opere di Emilio Salgari e di Giulio Verne dedicate ai giovani lettori; e, non a caso, la stesura di fiabe da parte di Gozzano esprime il bisogno del recupero di una identità tardiva rispetto ad altri paesi. Nel testo si osserva che, nonostante la permanenza in India, lo scrittore ha sempre avuto l’ansia di un ritorno a casa. Senza dubbio il viaggio indiano rappresenta la ricerca di una nuova fonte d’ispirazione, forse un po’ come la terra di Diomida montaliana; purtroppo la sua estranierà a quel mondo culturalmente ricco e travolgente lo porta a vivere quell’esperienza come un kitsch culturale. L’India di Gozzano è diversa da quella di un Herman Hesse, al quale quella terra ispira modelli di stampo psicologico analitico, e comunque risulta fonte di una nuova spiritualità.. Tuttavia *Le lettere dall’India* anticipano lo stile gozzaniano della tecnica dell’enumerazione poetica, per cui esse possono essere considerate un terreno fertile sul quale egli sperimenta nuove soluzioni poetiche. L’enumerazione è adottata dallo stesso Di Biagi quando si accinge a descrivere la camaleontica personalità di Gozzano: “poeta sentimentale, arido dandy, esteta... donnaiolo, cineasta, ...entomologo, ...sportivo, malato” (p. 65). Di Biagi elenca ben ventitré appellativi che aumentano la nostra comprensione e conoscenza di Gozzano uomo e poeta. Il processo di simbiosi fra il critico e il poeta è un divertito atteggiamento.

mento che il Di Biagi coltiva verso situazioni gozzaniane; lui stesso diventa “cinicone” e “ghittoso”: Gozzano lo ha reso simile a sé, lo ha trasformato in un osservatore ironico proprio come si rivela lo scrittore nei propri racconti. Gozzano novelliere sta tutto al di là del Gozzano poeta, anzi gli sopravvive, e i racconti sembrano rappresentare l’ultima forma di attaccamento superstite al mestiere della scrittura.

Il Di Biagi definisce lo stile gozzaniano: “Gozzano scrive in prosa altrettanto bene di quanto scriva in poesia: è tanto facile verseggiatore quanto è musicale e scorrevole narratore, elegante fino al dandismo, preciso e accurato nelle descrizioni e spietato nelle definizioni, lapidario quando serve, fiorito e colorito quando necessario, frivolo e mondano, ma spesso paradossale e pungente” (p. 78). Parla una lingua colta, “certo non sperimentale o tantomeno avanguardistica come quella dei contemporanei futuristi o anche dei vociani” (p. 78). Non è la scrittura di uno Slataper, di un Papini o di uno Jahier, che sono orientati verso nuove espressioni stilistiche, mentre con Gozzano rimaniamo nell’alveo della sua formazione borghese. Ciò che contribuisce a una modernità di stile in Gozzano è il cinema, con l’immediatezza di contenuto attraverso l’immagine. Il disegno che introduce il terzo capitolo del Di Biagi, intitolato “Le farfalle a Torino”, affronta il significato della stessa immagine della farfalla bianca che, elusiva come la Balena Bianca di Melville e l’*Horcynus Orca* di D’Arrigo, assurge a simbolo di poesia. A differenza di questi due cetacei, la farfalla gozzaniana è considerata anche nel suo aspetto biologico e filologico. È degna di considerazione l’informazione che il critico dà dal punto di vista economico e gastronomico. La nomenclatura della stessa farfalla in fine si rivela fonte di creatività poetica, come del resto l’utilizzo della stessa immagine nello stile Liberty. La “femme fatale” languida, il neo-misticismo fin-de-siècle, l’elemento floreale tratto dalle cineserie diventano modelli iconografici della poesia gozzaniana che è lontana dalla robustezza delle *Odi Barbare*. Tuttavia le farfalle di Gozzano — asserisce il Di Biagi — “sono la risposta in forma di poesia discorsiva-esistenziale alla certezza della morte e del destino umano” (p. 131).

All’accusa di plagio nei confronti di Gozzano, il critico si muove in difesa del poeta. Lo scrittore risale alla fonte ispiratrice mostrando così la sua statura intellettuale e la sua originalità, che sta proprio nel aver creato un mondo tutto suo. Gozzano fa letteratura, è persona troppo intelligente per poter essere preso con le mani nel sacco, il suo atteggiamento è volutamente depistante. Il Di Biagi, come altri critici citati nel testo, mostra un atteggiamento di studioso onesto. Nell’analizzare la scrittura del poeta torinese, nel riadattamento dell’endecasillabo sciolto, il critico ne definisce la

modernità, in quanto l'avvicina di più al verso libero della poesia moderna. Il risalire a Dante ne è anche un sintomo, visto l'impatto che lo stesso Dante ha avuto sulla poesia moderna in generale, e non solo su quella italiana. L'uso dell'endecasillabo fa sì che Gozzano possa essere classificato in un filone poetico di ampio respiro che lo avvicini alla poesia moderna europea e, perché no, anche a quella americana.

Non a caso il Di Biagi mette in risalto la novità della scrittura poetica gozzaniana: la freschezza e vigore che è tipica dell'arte drammatica. Il lavoro di "drenaggi e sfruttamenti e riscritture hanno ... precedenti nei precedenti" (p.144), ma questo è l'atteggiamento che un grande scrittore ha verso la propria tradizione: rispetto, originalità e identità. A questo punto è bene tener presente il saggio di T. S. Eliot, *Tradition and Individual Talent*, e come esso ci aiuti a comprendere l'universale, abbracciare l'esperienza, tutta l'esperienza letteraria, il passaggio dal particolare all'universale della poesia metafisica, come del resto la farfalla sta a simboleggiare. L'enumerazione rende la poesia in un crescendo stilistico e fa sì che la poesia si libri al di sopra della concretezza. L'abbandono delle forme chiuse e delle rime, che sono sì congeniali a Gozzano, è pure un sintomo di poesia nuova. *Le farfalle* sono come *Le foglie d'erba* dell'americano Walt Whitman: entrambe assurgono al valore di poesia aperta a più ampio respiro.

Gozzano è sì uno dei maggiori poeti, ma non certo solo del crepuscolarismo. Se la sua sceneggiatura per il film *San Francesco*, mai realizzato, mostra una tendenza ascetica, ciò non toglie che possa essere considerato anche un precursore di una forma di spiritualità riscontrabile in Pasolini, soprattutto nel terzo film della sua trilogia sulle fiabe. Certamente Gozzano è una prima donna che vede nella malattia anche un motivo per attirare su di sé l'attenzione, un altro modo di costruire se stesso come il perso-naggio "guidogozzano" (p.151).

Le farfalle si librano come il volo delle aquile whitmaniane: un volo ulisside, irregolare, vagabondo, condotto per diletto, scrive il Di Biagi (p. 162). La poesia diventa un gioco amoroso con il poeta stesso: come è vero per Whitman, anche per Gozzano le farfalle sono un esempio di poesia prosastica di uno scrittore che continua a starsene comodamente nascosto nelle biblioteche e nelle antologie e che il saggio di Flaminio Di Biagi ha avuto il merito di tirare fuori.

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LUCIANO PARISI

## I ROMANZI DI NATALIA GINZBURG

Vorrei rileggere i romanzi di Natalia Ginzburg (1916-91) per sottolineare prima la coerenza fra le scelte tematiche e stilistiche della scrittrice, e per porre poi alcune domande che mi sembrano rilevanti per la comprensione del suo lavoro: lo stile della Ginzburg è femminile nel senso che Cesare Garboli e lei stessa hanno attribuito al termine? c'è in quei romanzi una vena tragica? c'è uno sviluppo, un'involuzione, o comunque un marcato cambiamento del punto di vista? Le altre opere della Ginzburg sono confrontabili coi romanzi? È appena il caso di dire che le mie risposte, quando ne dò, servono a sollecitare il dibattito, e non hanno la pretesa di concluderlo<sup>1</sup>.

\* \* \*

Nella storia della Ginzburg romanziere ci sono due fasi distinte. La prima va dal 1942 (data del suo primo libro, *La strada che va in città*) al 1963 (l'anno di *Lessico famigliare*)<sup>2</sup>, e su di essa mi soffermerò più a lungo. La seconda va dal 1973 (l'anno di *Caro Michele*) al 1984 (quando esce l'ultimo romanzo, *La città e la casa*). I sette libri scritti tra il 1942 e il 1963 raccontano le storie di gruppi abbastanza folti di persone e ricreano la complessa atmosfera in cui vivono coloro che li formano. Le famiglie de *La strada che va in città*, *Valentino*, *Tutti i nostri ieri*, *Le voci della sera* sono lacerate da animosità o da antipatie profonde: 'odiavo la nostra casa. Odiavo la minestra verde e amara che mia madre ci metteva davanti ogni sera, e odiavo mia madre' (1:7). Un giovane si uccide, e ai familiari pare impossibile 'di non avergli mai chiesto se aveva forse bisogno di aiuto, di non averlo seguito quando passeggiava solo, di non essersi seduti con lui quando stava a fumare sulla panchina' (1:402). Anche in *Lessico famigliare*, che ha un'atmosfera più serena, la famiglia di Natalia è divisa da rancori fra genitori e figli, e fra fratelli e sorelle: 'ricordo con terrore quei tre uomini che lottavano selvaggiamente', dice la scrittrice parlando delle liti fra Alberto, Mario e il padre (p. 935)<sup>3</sup>.

La solitudine è uno stato d'animo ricorrente nei personaggi di quei romanzi, ma è attenuata dalla fitta rete di rapporti collettivi in cui ogni storia individuale si inserisce. Delia, ne *La strada che va in città*, è una ragazza sbandata, che comunica a fatica con gli altri. Eppure, nel paese in cui nasconde una gravidanza non voluta, riceve visite, sente le opinioni di familiari e amici, interagisce con loro: ‘venne [...] una volta Azalea. Capitò il pomeriggio’ (1:47); ‘Giovanni me lo vidi capitare qualche giorno dopo. Arrivò su in motocicletta’ (1:49); poco dopo ‘vidi aprirsi il cancello ed entrò il Nini’ (1:52); ‘l'indomani venne mia madre e mi trovò con la febbre’ (1:56). Il padre di Anna, in *Tutti i nostri ieri*, è mortalmente malato ma resta in contatto con gli altri; parla, chiede oggetti, fa segni; ‘tutti’ sanno quel che succede nella sua stanza; e la tragedia si attenua su quello sfondo di generale attenzione al suo male:

[...] si mise a letto e non gli fu più possibile alzarsi. Stava sempre peggio a poco a poco e moriva, e *tutti lo sapevano*, e certo anche lui lo sapeva, ma faceva finta di niente lui che parlava sempre di morire prima di ammalarsi davvero; *diceva sempre meno cose* col passare dei giorni, a poco a poco *soltanto chiedeva quello che gli serviva* [...] qualche volta *faceva segno ai due ragazzi* che entrarono, ma poi *non diceva niente che si capisse*, erano parole confuse e con le braccia si sgualciva il pigiama sul letto. [...] Di sotto l'armadio spuntavano le scarpe lunghe e aguzze del padre che *si sapeva* che non ci avrebbe camminato più perché presto sarebbe morto (1:281, corsivi miei)<sup>4</sup>.

Un personaggio generalmente secondario, ma principale in *È stato così* e ne *Le voci della sera*, osserva il comportamento degli altri, e coglie questa dimensione collettiva. È una giovane, generalmente diplomata o laureata in lettere<sup>5</sup>, in cerca di affetto e pronta per istinto a dare il proprio a quelli che la circondano; guarda il mondo con attenzione, senza capirlo, incerta sui propri sentimenti, e su quello che è giusto o utile fare. Si stupisce, in *Valentino*, dei propri genitori, che non si chiedono se le piacerebbe sposarsi (1:231), di un amico che le si propone come consorte, e di se stessa che lo accetta senza esserne innamorata (1:248). In *È stato così* passa le notti con gli occhi spalancati interrogandosi sul marito: ‘io non lo saprò mai cosa vuole davvero. Io non lo saprò mai cosa vuole davvero’ (1:159). In *Tutti i nostri ieri* sposa chi crede di non amare, e s'accorge con sorpresa che la casa di lui è anche la sua (1:462). Lo sguardo di questo personaggio rinforza nel mondo circostante gli elementi che gli danno coesione; ne individua il ‘nucleo’, l’‘unità’ (1:920-921). Anna, in *Tutti i nostri ieri*, è attenta ai ricordi della signora Maria, ai fidanzati della sorella, al libro che il padre tenta di scrivere, alle cartoline che Cenzo Rena manda da tutti i punti del

mondo; e si rende conto dei taciti presupposti che legano fra loro queste persone, e del bisogno che esse hanno di vedersi e di parlarsi. Trasferitasi al Sud 'si sentiva mortificata per tutte le cose che succedevano così lontano da lei' (1:453); 'aspettava sempre la posta con un gran batticuore, ma poi appena lette le lettere si sentiva sempre un po' mortificata per le cose che succedevano senza di lei' (1:466). Anche la giovane Ginzburg, confinata in Abruzzo e impegnata in un simile ruolo di cronista familiare, prova una nostalgia 'acuta ed amara' all'arrivo di 'lettere dalla nostra città, con notizie di nozze e di morti dalle quali eravamo esclusi' (1:789). Il personaggio femminile che osserva e racconta le vicende di questi romanzi sembra riflettere i sentimenti della scrittrice, e prende da lei l'attenzione per le comunità di cui si trova a far parte<sup>6</sup>.

I personaggi si moltiplicano di continuo. Nel più breve di questi romanzi, *Sagittario*, compaiono tutti i componenti della famiglia di una truffatrice, della famiglia di una truffata, ed anche di una famiglia che la truffatrice sente il bisogno di inventare per suggestionare la vittima e portare a termine la propria impresa. Il proliferare di personaggi, che in altri scrittori soffocherebbe romanzi della stessa lunghezza, è congeniale alla Ginzburg, che non si sofferma di proposito su nessun carattere, e su nessun tema, e ne può perciò allineare molti con efficacia. Anche agli eventi la Ginzburg accenna appena. Adriano, in *Lessico famigliare*, 'tornò dall'este-ro, e si sposò con mia sorella Paola. Mia sorella, appena sposata, si tagliò i capelli; e mio padre non disse niente, perché ormai non poteva più dirle niente' (1:979). Che cosa ha spinto Adriano e Paola a volersi bene, come si è sviluppato il loro amore, come poi si estingue, come reagiscono ad esso familiari ed amici, non è detto, né sembra essere un argomento rilevante per la narratrice. Poco dopo la Ginzburg annuncia: 'ci sposammo, Leone ed io; e andammo a vivere nella casa di via Pallamaglio' (1:1026); suo padre, aggiunge, non era contento; e la narrazione prosegue parlando di tutt'altro. Agli effetti delle leggi razziali del 1938 in Italia Giorgio Bassani e Rosetta Loy hanno dedicato romanzi complessi; la Ginzburg li evoca in due righe: 'mio padre, anche lui aveva perso la cattedra. Fu invitato a Liegi, a lavorare in un istituto. Partì e lo accompagnò mia madre' (1:1039)<sup>7</sup>. Questo modo di raccontare è più marcato in *Lessico famigliare*, ma ad esso tendono tutte le opere della Ginzburg. Gli avvenimenti le interessano meno de 'il corso quotidiano dell'esistenza, che procede uniforme, e apparentemente senza segreti' (1:802-803)<sup>8</sup>. La Ginzburg contrappone la propria visione delle cose a quella dell'amico Cesare Pavese: 'vedevamo bene dove sbagliava: nel non volersi piegare ad amare il corso quotidiano dell'esistenza, che procede uniforme, e apparentemente senza segreti. Gli

restava dunque, da conquistare, la realtà quotidiana' (1:802-803). La Ginzburg cita con amore autori grandi e piccoli, e dà un giudizio negativo del solo Emilio Salgari, che evoca l'avventura e gli avvenimenti straordinari (1:249 e 1028), perché avventure e avvenimenti straordinari (o avvenimenti *tout court*) non rientrano nel suo orizzonte ideale: 'io resterei sempre a casa, non mi muoverei mai' (1:821). Si definisce viaggiatrice maldestra (2:88); si rifugia in albergo quando viaggia, e quello che la induce ad uscire 'non è l'ansia di conoscere, ma il pensiero che in quell'albergo potranno meravigliarsi non vedendol[a] uscire mai dalla stanza' (2:90). Le poesie più belle, secondo la Ginzburg, sono 'semplici, fatte di niente; fatte delle cose che si guarda[no]' (1:947). Gli autori di cui dice di aver sentito il fascino da bambina sono Pascoli, Gozzano, Corazzini (1:840).

La 'realtà quotidiana' che conquista e che è al centro della sua opera, è fatta di parole, gesti, abitudini, piccole storie importanti solo nella mitologia privata di una famiglia. La Ginzburg presta attenzione a ciò che le persone mangiano, ai loro gesti, alle frasi ricorrenti nel loro linguaggio<sup>9</sup>. Giustino, in *Tutti i nostri ieri*, aggiunge mezzo bicchiere di latte alle frittate perché così fanno i grandi cuochi, ed è 'fiero della sua pietanza' (1:391). Sembra un dettaglio privo di importanza, ma Natalia Ginzburg lo difende, critica dei romanzi dove 'si legge che viene portato "some food" senza 'nessuna affettuosa specificazione' (1:818). *Lessico famigliare* registra le parole e le frasi pronunciate più spesso dalla nonna della scrittrice ('in questa casa si fa bordello di tutto', 1:907), da suo padre ('voialtri non sapete stare a tavola! Non siete gente da portare nei loghi', 1:901), da sua madre e i suoi fratelli. La ripetizione di queste frasi richiama un insieme di presupposti comuni, di intese, di convenzioni. Giacomo Magrini parla della madre di Natalia come della coautrice di *Lessico famigliare* (pp. 773 e 780), perché la signora Lidia aveva diffuso fra i figli l'abitudine di ridire alcune frasi speciali ('l'è le, l'è le, l'è la sorella della mia cagna', 'ti te vedet quel pan li. L'è tutta barite', 'non siamo venuti a Bergamo per fare campagna') per evocare le storie che vi erano collegate. Una compagna ai tempi del collegio 's'era staccata dalla fila, correndo ad abbracciare un cane che passava: lo abbracciava, e diceva: — L'è le, l'è le, l'è la sorella della mia cagna' (1:914). Qualcuno aveva spiegato a una parente, soprannominata la Barite, 'che dappertutto c'è della barite: perciò lei indicava, per esempio, il pane sulla tavola, e diceva: — Ti te vedet quel pan li. L'è tutta barite' (1:914). Un direttore d'orchestra, amico di famiglia, 'trovandosi a Bergamo per una tournée, aveva detto ai cantanti distratti o indisciplinati: — Non siamo venuti a Bergamo per fare campagna, bensì per dirigere la *Carmen*, capolavoro di Bizet' (1:920). Questi aneddoti assumono all'interno della famiglia

la funzione referenziale che l'epica aveva all'interno delle società d'un tempo. Nel brano più citato di *Lessico famigliare* la Ginzburg afferma con sicurezza la loro importanza:

noi siamo cinque fratelli. Abitiamo in città diverse, alcuni di noi stanno all'estero: e non ci scriviamo spesso. Quando c'incontriamo, possiamo essere, l'uno con l'altro, indifferenti o distratti. Ma basta, fra noi, una parola. Basta una parola, una frase: una di quelle frasi antiche, sentite e ripetute infinite volte, nel tempo della nostra infanzia. Ci basta dire: 'Non siamo venuti a Bergamo per fare campagna' o 'De cosa spussa l'acido solfidrico' per ritrovare a un tratto i nostri antichi rapporti, e la nostra infanzia e giovinezza, legata indissolubilmente a quelle frasi, a quelle parole. Una di quelle frasi o parole, ci farebbe riconoscere l'uno con l'altro, noi fratelli, nel buio d'una grotta, fra milioni di persone (1:920).

Quelle espressioni sono il fondamento di un'unità, che 'sussisterà finché saremo al mondo' (1:921). La Ginzburg si interessa anche ai soprannomi delle persone<sup>10</sup>, al modo in cui alcuni conoscenti deformano le parole<sup>11</sup>, ai titoli dei libri che la gente legge, alle cose su cui pronuncia più spesso qualche giudizio, ai giochi che fa, ai versi che scrive. I giudizi sono poco approfonditi, e i versi banali: 'bello è veder di sera e di mattina / Del Perego la cà e la cantina' (1:916); 'non è ver che sia Pierino / Il peggior dei miei ragazzi, / Tutti e sette sono pazzi, / Dalla Giulia al Filippino'<sup>12</sup>. Non valgono come poesia, ma come ricordo di un momento spensierato. Il modo migliore per avvicinarsi ai romanzi della Ginzburg non è dunque quello di analizzare la loro trama (gli eventi, in genere, sono poco rilevanti), o il carattere dei personaggi (che sono troppi), ma il fare attenzione a questi dettagli – all'inessenziale di altri che diventa qui essenziale.

Alla dimensione familiare corrisponde un linguaggio colloquiale, semplificato in toni, lessico e sintassi<sup>13</sup>. I toni contenuti attenuano l'espressione delle emozioni. Una protagonista di Anna Banti, davanti alla malattia del marito, si dispera. Poi,

da una tempesta di tremiti convulsivi e di sussulti, una forza sconosciuta scaturì che la inarcò come un giunco, appena la testa e i piedi sfioravano il materasso, e da quell'arco che era il suo corpo teso fino a spezzarsi poche parole si liberarono in lei con estrema violenza: 'Cristo, aiuto, Cristo la mia vita per la sua, prendila'. Fu colta da una immensa debolezza come se cadesse dall'alto. Forse sveniva (Banti, *Un grido*, p. 61)<sup>14</sup>.

La Ginzburg si esprime in maniera molto più dimessa. Quando Cenzo, in *Tutti i nostri ieri*, rischia di morire di tifo, sua moglie

pensava un attimo a Amalia, a mammina e a Giuma, com'era strano che esistessero ancora tutte quelle persone, per lei adesso c'era solo il tifo, la

grande casa vuota e silenziosa e la faccia di Cenzo Rena sempre più stralunata e più rossa (1:514).

Il malato migliora e ‘Anna era molto contenta’ (1:516). Da una parte ci sono le tempeste, i tremiti, le convulsioni, gli inarcamenti; dall’altra una faccia rossa, dei pensieri, delle stranezze. La Banti adopera molte subordinate; la Ginzburg si limita alle coordinate; eppure sa esprimere ‘un rapporto col mondo esterno fatto di affetto, di stupore, d’ironia, di senso della limitatezza propria e di ciascuno’ (Calvino, 1:1089; si veda anche Barberi Squarotti, p. 161).

L’insistenza della Ginzburg sui gruppi familiari si riflette anche in uno stile polifonico. In questo contesto la parola polifonica è stata intesa in tre modi diversi. *Lessico famigliare*, in primo luogo, è polifonico perché intreccia costantemente due voci diverse: quella dei Levi (‘l’è le, l’è le, l’è la sorella della mia cagna’); e quella della narratrice, che fornisce ai lettori le integrazioni necessarie per capire parole insolite e formulazioni stravaganti (Simborowski). Il romanzo, in secondo luogo, è polifonico perché nessun personaggio domina sugli altri: le loro voci sono intrecciate e una non potrebbe sussistere senza le altre; anche la marginalità che l’io narrante mantiene nella storia è funzionale al rispetto di un ‘patrimonio collettivo’ che ‘non ha un marchio di proprietà (soggettiva) e che la narratrice si incarica semplicemente di trasmettere’<sup>15</sup>. Le battute di tutti questi romanzi, infine, sono polifoniche perché passano da un personaggio ad un altro, in un gioco di citazioni e di continuo rinnovamento dei significati. Le parole del professor Levi (‘com’è che loro sono tanto amici di Petrolini? Dev’essere una persona equivoca’) vengono contestate dalla moglie (‘E Molière? [...] Molière non faceva anche lui l’attore? Non dirai mica che era una persona equivoca?’) e riprese poi dalla figlia (‘un letterato, un critico, uno scrittore, rappresentava qualcosa di spregevole, di frivolo, e anche di equivoco’)<sup>16</sup>.

In qualche caso la scrittura di Natalia Ginzburg ricorda quella dell’*école du regard*, una cui eco specifica emerge nei due esordi di *Famiglia*. Gli oggetti, però, hanno di rado importanza nella Ginzburg. Quando ce l’hanno, contano per i sentimenti che si sono attaccati ad essi — la misericordia, lo sdegno, l’emozione. Nell’arte d’avanguardia degli anni ’60, secondo la Ginzburg, ‘al posto del guardare e dell’ascoltare la specie degli uomini, c’è l’attenzione votata con meticoloso puntiglio al mondo inanimato degli oggetti e alle mille voci minerali che si sono sostituite alla voce umana’. Quel rifiuto nasce da un ‘ribrezzo per la razza umana e per le condizioni in cui si trova’ (2:42); e da esso la Ginzburg prende le distanze.

\* \* \*

Vorrei soffermarmi ora su quattro punti che non sono stati adeguatamente dibattuti in sede critica: l’atteggiamento che più intimamente corrisponde

al modo di narrare della Ginzburg; lo stato d'animo che prevale, se uno prevale, nei suoi romanzi; la qualità delle altre sue opere; e le variazioni interne alla sua produzione narrativa. Secondo Cesare Garboli l'atteggiamento della Ginzburg — concentrata sui dettagli della realtà quotidiana e indirettamente attenta alla storia universale, agli eventi, agli obbiettivi dell'agire umano — è tipico dell'“intelligenza femminile” (p. XXV). In un saggio dedicato al romanzo *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*, la Ginzburg condivide quest'impostazione: il libro di Elizabeth Smart, dice, ‘lo poteva scrivere solo una donna’; l’identità femminile è ‘onnipresente in ogni riga’ (2:524). Il modo maschile di scrivere — spiega la Ginzburg riprendendo senza saperlo una metafora di Borgese che ebbe molto successo negli anni ’20 — è quello di chi architetta, edifica, combina luoghi e persone spostandoli dal loro contesto originario anche quando sono ‘pesanti come macigni’ e, scrivendo, si sente ‘forte’ e ‘virile’ (2:525-526). Il modo della Smart è quello di ‘non costruire nulla, non architettare nulla e restare se stess[a]’; non si sente forte, ma ‘debole, languid[a] e molle. Spera che la poesia e la vita fluiscano dal suo languore’ (2:526). Nei saggi della Ginzburg le parole cambiano spesso di significato; e quella che viene presentata come una alternativa fra modo maschile e modo femminile di scrivere si evolve in una distinzione di tipo diverso. La Ginzburg descrive una donna alle prese col modo ‘maschile’ di scrivere (‘si sente a pezzi come se avesse fatto un trasloco’, 2:526; si veda anche 1:1131), ed attribuisce il modo ‘femminile’ a tutti gli autori — uomini e donne — del secondo ’900. Di sé parla al maschile (‘lo scrittore’, 2:189-196)<sup>17</sup>. Secondo Gianni Vattimo, più che emblematicamente femminile, la Ginzburg è stata una narratrice esterna alle ‘prospettive metafisiche assolutistiche’ e ‘vicina alle tematiche del pensiero debole’ (p. 2), refrattaria cioè a una interpretazione sistematica del reale<sup>18</sup>. Caratterizzazioni così specifiche dipendono anche dai presupposti culturali dei lettori. Qualunque definizione se ne dia, però, è chiaro che il punto di vista della Ginzburg corrisponde a una scoperta della modernità: ‘what was once the less than desirable attachment to the domestic, the “minor”, or the quotidian in women’s writing — osserva Rebecca West — is now investigated from critical perspectives that validate those areas’ (p. 7).

Riferendosi alla Ginzburg, Henry Stuart Hughes parla di ‘a mental universe of pain’ (p. 97), la Marchionne Picchione di una ‘grigia fissità del dolore’ (p. 15), Antonia Mazza di ‘uno sconforto senza rimedio’ (p. 218). Alba Aloia attribuisce alla Ginzburg una ‘grim awareness of the human condition’ (p. 63). Ma questi romanzi sono davvero pessimistici, o tragici? I personaggi sono spesso abbandonati a se stessi, e frustrati nei loro

desideri; ma la scrittrice non pronuncia mai (e non implica neppure) giudizi globalmente negativi sull'esistenza, innanzi tutto perché rifugge dai giudizi globali; e poi perché la malinconia le sembra, se non un valore, una componente indispensabile di un'esistenza genuina (2:109)<sup>19</sup>. Tutti appartengono a una comunità, e quell'appartenenza ha un che di consolatorio: si può prevedere un tempo in cui le famiglie e i villaggi scompariranno, sostituiti da città anonime, e sentire 'lo strazio d'essere fra gli ultimi'; ma la scrittrice è fra coloro che avvertono soprattutto 'la grande e libera allegria e felicità di avere avuto ancora per esistere un breve istante' (2:53-54)<sup>20</sup>.

Le sfumature che caratterizzano la narrazione della Ginzburg sono molto particolari e non tutti i generi letterari, a mio parere, permettono di realizzarle. I racconti si soffermano su un carattere, un evento, un tema, e non consentono il vasto intreccio di figure e di parole<sup>21</sup>; nelle commedie i personaggi si impegnano in confessioni prolungate, che sono poco congeniali all'estro della scrittrice<sup>22</sup>; anche la ricerca storica sulla famiglia Manzoni è alla fine poco convincente — utilizzando le testimonianze di parenti ed amici dell'autore de *I promessi sposi*, la Ginzburg evoca un'altra volta la molteplicità di voci che si mescolano nel tono fondamentalmente unitario di una famiglia; le lettere di Giulia Beccaria o di sua nipote Vittoria, però, non ricreano il 'lessico' dei Manzoni; e il loro recupero su-scita 'feelings of indifference which lead inexorably to intense boredom' (Bullock, p. 33)<sup>23</sup>. La Ginzburg avrebbe potuto trovare spunti interessanti nelle opere di Manzoni, ma una simile scelta andava contro il suo istinto narrativo<sup>24</sup>, e la coerenza di un'autrice è confermata anche dalle sue debolezze.

I risultati migliori della Ginzburg non sono però circoscritti ad un'unica formula<sup>25</sup>. Come saggista la scrittrice rivendica con forza il valore dei romanzi in un'epoca ad essi ostile (2:52); celebra il potere che hanno 'di spazzare via da noi la viltà, il torpore e la sottomissione alle idee collettive' e 'di portarci di colpo nel cuore del vero' (2:53); spiega il valore che lettori e critici hanno per gli scrittori (2:78-82, 177-183). Negli articoli sulla condizione femminile, la persecuzione, la pietà, la Ginzburg, che 'non ha mai amato ingolfarsi in complicazioni', 'si trova implicat[a] in strani grovigli' e 'lentamente cerca di districarsi'. È costretta alla pazienza: scrive 'assai lentamente'; si ferma 'dieci volte a fare e disfare' (2:190); impara a distinguere, e a restare fedele alle proprie distinzioni. Parla di Dio, prendendo le distanze dal partito clericale ('se [il credere] fosse una bandiera, quelli che credono si sentirebbero tutti insieme come un esercito di soldati, che camminava in trionfo [...] e allora ciascuno s'accorgerebbe che Dio sta esattamente dall'altra parte', 2:165) e da quello irreligioso ('se il credere fosse davvero

viltà e debolezza, chi crede dovrebbe sentirsi rassicurato e tranquillo, e protetto nella sua debolezza; e invece non è per nulla così', 2:165). Si impegna in una fenomenologia del credere basata sulle proprie esperienze: non le piace pensare a Dio come a un padre o a un fratello o a un amico, ma se

contempla nel suo ricordo il volto del suo proprio padre, o di sua madre, o dei suoi veri fratelli e amici, o dei suoi figli, se cioè pensa a persone vere e precise, siano vive o morte, e contempla il suo amore per loro e le memorie di giorni e luoghi con loro abitati e vissuti, e si sente in quelle memorie pien[a] di ardenti lagrime e di una strana felicità, allora per un attimo sente tremare e fluttuare qualcosa che subito sparisce e che era, forse, Dio (2:166-167).

Il divino si manifesta qui come una forma trasfigurata di ciò che la scrittrice ha sempre e massimamente ammirato: la vita familiare; l'amore per i genitori, i figli, i fratelli, gli amici; l'attenzione verso chi ci circonda.

Gli ultimi romanzi della Ginzburg sono usciti nel 1973 (*Caro Michele*), nel 1977 (*Famiglia e Borghesia*, raccolti nello stesso volume) e nel 1984 (*La città e la casa*). Riproponendo i suoi temi di sempre, la scrittrice cerca di adattarli a una situazione nuova. Ritroviamo storie di grandi famiglie (cinque fratelli e sorelle in *Caro Michele*, cinque ne *La città e la casa*). Nessun personaggio, tema od evento prevale sugli altri. Conta il ritrovarsi insieme: 'queste persone, io non mi accorgo di desiderarne la compagnia, ma se non le vedo per qualche giorno, ne sento la mancanza' (2:486); 'erano, quelle [...] le persone con le quali si sentiva meglio al mondo. Stare con loro era semplice' (2:710-711); 'si rallegrava di essere di nuovo in quella stanza e su quella poltrona, ad ascoltare le voci dei soli amici che egli aveva al mondo' (2:733). Conta il ripensarsi: 'non si amano soltanto le memorie felici. A un certo punto della vita, ci si accorge che si amano le memorie' (2:380); 'nella nostra vita presente non c'è nulla che valga i luoghi e gli attimi incontrati lungo il percorso' (2:496). La forma epistolare o semi-epistolare fa risuonare ancora una volta insieme molte voci: l'imprenditrice coesiste così col giovane terrorista, la madre piena di premure, la ragazza sbandata, l'intellettuale dalle difficili esigenze sentimentali.

L'Italia però è cambiata: negli anni '70 e '80 le famiglie non hanno più un luogo che le contenga stabilmente (la casa di via Pastrengo, lo chalet di Gressoney) e i rapporti al loro interno sono irregolari. Solo un susseguirsi di telefonate, messaggi, lettere e cartoline tiene insieme i personaggi, e tanta instabilità, secondo la Ginzburg, impedisce il formarsi di solide abitudini familiari. Anche la scrittrice è cambiata: il suo *alter ego* non è più la ragazza che aspira al matrimonio o fronteggia la maternità, ma la madre

anziana o la nonna che si ostina a fare raccomandazioni a figli e nipoti senza comprendere le nuove generazioni<sup>26</sup>: ‘il modo come i nostri figli riescono ad abitarlo [il mondo] e a decifrarlo ci è oscuro’ (2:26); ‘oggi i giovani [...] non capisci mai bene cosa pensano di te, se ti stimano un poco o se ti trovano un perfetto imbecille’ (2:1435). La Ginzburg si dipinge con ironia — brontolona (2:66), facile al lamento (2:410) e alle lacrime (2:379-380) — e tuttavia il suo punto di vista si è incipito; l’acidità di giudizio prevale sull’indulgenza. La moglie di un personaggio è ‘bassa e grassa, con l’accento piemontese, con un’aria da portinaia’; ha ‘una figlia di sedici anni, brutta, occhialuta e pesante’ (2:721); Ninetta è superficiale e il marito, ‘la detestava. Detestava anche le altre due con lei [...]. Detestava tutte le persone di quella stanza, e la stanza’ (2:714). La pietà sfuma nell’indifferenza: il mondo non stupisce, o ‘stupisce assai poco’ (2:25)<sup>27</sup>. Per questo, mi sembra, la Ginzburg resta la narratrice dell’Italia della sua giovinezza (2:510). Misurandosi con quella degli anni successivi, tuttavia, ha dato indicazioni preziose per la sua rappresentazione letteraria.

Il nostro mondo, dice riferendosi a quello della propria infanzia, ‘noi lo amavamo, non perché lo trovassimo bello o giusto, ma perché vi spendevamo le nostre forze, la nostra vita e il nostro stupore’ (2:25). Quello dei suoi figli è pieno di gente sbandata, vagabonda e balorda, ma ‘ognuno di noi è sbandato e balordo in una zona di sé e qualche volta fortemente attratto dal vagabondare’ (2:477). Anche quel mondo viene indagato perciò con pazienza. L’eredità più importante della Ginzburg è proprio la costanza con cui ha amato e cercato di capire quelli che la circondavano, ‘con le loro assurdità e stranezze e incoerenze e comiche manie’ (2:170).

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#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup> Per un’introduzione alla vita e le opere della Ginzburg si vedano Pflug, Quarsiti, e le interviste contenute in Ginzburg, *È difficile parlare di sé*.

<sup>2</sup> Di *Lessico famigliare* dice la Ginzburg nell’‘Avvertenza’: ‘benché tratto dalla realtà, penso che si debba leggerlo come se fosse un romanzo: e cioè senza chiedergli nulla di più, né di meno, di quello che un romanzo può dare’ (1:899).

<sup>3</sup> Le comunità descritte dalla Ginzburg sono eterogenee anche formalmente: per buona parte del libro, ad esempio, un esile filo narrativo unisce i torinesi della prima parte di *Tutti i nostri ieri* e i contadini meridionali che compaiono nella seconda parte.

<sup>4</sup> Nella Ginzburg la morte suscita orrore quando è solitaria: si vedano 1:792, e il commento di Woolf, p. 254.

<sup>5</sup>Per un'analisi dettagliata si veda Bullock, pp. 64-91.

<sup>6</sup>Clotilde Soave Bowe afferma inizialmente che non bisogna identificare il punto di vista di questo personaggio con quello della scrittrice (p. 789), ma ammette poi che questa figura è per la Ginzburg 'partly the projection of a retrospective literary *persona* for herself' (p. 795). Sul legame fra le varie manifestazioni di questo personaggio e Natalia Ginzburg si vedano le *Opere*, 2:154 e 623; *È difficile parlare di sé*, pp. 29 e 34; Sanguineti Katz, p. 123; e Puppa, pp. 153-55.

<sup>7</sup>Il padre della Ginzburg fu un grande scienziato: a Torino ebbe come studenti due futuri premi Nobel per la medicina, Renato Dulbecco e Rita Levi Montalcini – che di lui parla a lungo in *Elogio dell'imperfezione. Lessico familiare* non dice nulla di quei successi.

<sup>8</sup>In *The Italians and the Holocaust* Susan Zuccotti racconta alcuni episodi che appaiono anche in *Lessico familiare*: la fuga di Turati in Francia, nella sua versione, 'is a stirring tale of courage and daring'; nel libro della Ginzburg troviamo invece 'a private and comic view of events through the eyes of a ten-year-old child' (Woolf, pp. 246 e 247).

<sup>9</sup>Leggevo Ovidio in una vasta classe fredda a diciotto bambine', dice la professoressa di *È stato così*, (1:83); e poco dopo: 'leggevo Senofonte a diciotto bambine nella classe riverniciata di verde' (1:90). La storia di Valentino è accompagnata dai richiami alla speranza di suo padre 'che sarebbe diventato un grand'uomo', che 'diventasse un grand'uomo', 'lui che mio padre credeva che diventasse un grand'uomo' (1:219, 233 e 261).

<sup>10</sup>Le sorelle del Barbison erano chiamate "le Beate", essendo molto bigotte' (1:916); 'uno zio di mia madre [...] era soprannominato "il Demente" perché era medico dei matti' (1:919); 'mia madre vedendomi entrare scura, imbroni-ciata, diceva: "Ecco Maria Temporala"' (1:941).

<sup>11</sup>Nonna Pina chiedeva: 'ci sono *l'étere* per me?' (1:916), Paola Carrara 'riceveva settimanalmente il "Zurnàl de Zenève" (pronunciava il francese così)' (1:988)

<sup>12</sup>È significativo che questi siano gli unici versi manzoniani citati dalla Ginzburg ne *La famiglia Manzoni* (2:1243).

<sup>13</sup>Si vedano in proposito le osservazioni di Marchionne Picchione, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup>Anna Banti ammetteva l'esistenza di un'"enfasi retorica che nelle forti emozioni trasuda dalle donne colte come l'inchiostro dai polpi' (*Campi elisi*, p. 91). E tuttavia non rinunciò mai ai palpiti e alle lacrime: senza di esse, secondo lei, si affermava una 'scrittura spezzata e sterile', che costituiva il nuovo 'ciliozio della letteratura occidentale' (*Opinioni*, p. 41).

<sup>15</sup>Minghelli, pp. 159 e 161. Anche Clara Borrelli fa osservazioni interessanti sullo stile della Ginzburg e la sua capacità evocativa e lirica; è bene tenere presente però che quel lirismo non è fine a se stesso, ma funzionale ad una storia; e che il soggetto di quella storia non è un *io*, ma un *noi*.

<sup>16</sup>Ginzburg, I, pp. 955-960. In proposito si veda soprattutto Barani, pp. 151-153.

<sup>17</sup>In una *Nota* aggiunta alla ristampa dei primi romanzi la Ginzburg racconta che

all'inizio della sua carriera desiderava che i lettori non riconoscessero in lei una donna. Il motivo di quel desiderio era il bisogno di sottrarsi al sentimentalismo che caratterizza la letteratura femminile. Le scrittrici, dice la Ginzburg in un'intervista, 'non riescono a liberarsi dei sentimenti, non sanno guardare a se stesse ed agli altri con ironia. [...] Scrivere come un uomo vuol dire scrivere col distacco, la freddezza di un uomo. Cosa di cui le donne sono raramente capaci. Il distacco dai sentimenti, soprattutto. Non significa scrivere fingendo d'essere un uomo. Una donna deve scrivere come una donna però con le qualità di un uomo' (Fallaci, pp. 354-55).

<sup>18</sup>La Ginzburg, osserva a sua volta Angela M. Jeannet, non indulge in ricostruzioni improbabili di un passato difficile da capire: ha il merito di evitare le affermazioni totalizzanti, e di accettare la propria inevitabile parzialità.

<sup>19</sup>Si vedano in proposito Clementelli, p. 104, e Wood, pp. 135-141.

<sup>20</sup>I lettori novecenteschi vogliono 'vedere ovunque [...] visioni tragiche, sanguinose e solenni'; ma la Ginzburg celebra Goldoni, e invita quei lettori a 'festeggiare la fragilità, la delicatezza e la misura' (2:143). È vero peraltro che alcuni eventi si sottraggono al potere consolante della narrazione rievocatrice (Woolf, pp. 254-258).

<sup>21</sup>La Ginzburg non era soddisfatta dei racconti che ha composto, e ne ha inserito pochi nei due volumi delle *Opere*. Il critico più benevolo nei confronti dei racconti della Ginzburg è Gianfranco Borri (p. 27) che nega la coralità della narrativa ginzburghiana ('la coralità [...] non è il modulo letterario di Natalia; la scrittrice ha bisogno di ancorarsi, di riflettersi su di un volto, un gesto, uno specifico episodio per poter esprimere non solo la sua arte ma anche le sue idee, le sue convinzioni, le sue valutazioni del mondo', p. 143).

<sup>22</sup>Le commedie diventano efficaci quando il gioco dei riferimenti a personaggi assenti permette alla Ginzburg di ricreare il miracolo evocativo dei suoi romanzi, di rappresentare un vasto intreccio di relazioni e stati d'animo, e di ricostruire lo spirito di una improvvisata e precaria comunità moderna. Questo accade soprattutto in *Paese di mare* (2:29-68).

<sup>23</sup>Bernard Levin ha scritto de *La famiglia Manzoni*: 'I do not exaggerate when I say that I have rarely read a book so entirely devoid of the novelist's art', (p. 43).

<sup>24</sup>Nei romanzi della Ginzburg ci sono personaggi intenti a scrivere, a studiare, a costruire palazzi, o aziende economiche; ma ai risultati delle loro attività si accenna solo perché lo sforzo fattivo è al di là della dimensione quotidiana che la scrittrice privilegia. Solo nei saggi la Ginzburg parla de 'il sangue, il travaglio, lo strazio e la solitudine della creazione' (2:112); e dice che il mestiere di scrittore 'è un padrone, un padrone capace di frustarci a sangue, un padrone che grida e condanna' (1:853). Può darsi che la Ginzburg si sia accorta dell'errore commesso ne *La famiglia Manzoni*, e ne abbia parlato con autoironia: un personaggio de *La città e la casa*, del 1984, scrive una commedia dedicata alla moglie di un altro classico della letteratura italiana, Gemma

Donati Alighieri. Un amico ‘ha detto che aveva mal di testa e è rimasto a casa. A noi sottovoce ha detto che lui della moglie di Dante non ne vuole sapere. Preferisce Dante’ (2:1411). Un altro commenta: ‘povera Serena, povera Gemma Donati senza Dante’ (2:1409). Per una lettura non ironica di questo episodio si veda Picarazzi, pp. 347-348.

<sup>25</sup> *Lessico famigliare* era per la Ginzburg un punto d’arrivo: ‘non so se sia il migliore dei miei libri: ma certo è il solo libro che io abbia scritto in stato di assoluta libertà. [...] non mi domandai neppure una volta se scrivevo *per caso*. Il caso era totalmente esulato da me’ (1:1133). Sul valore dei romanzi che lo precedono si vedano Sanguineti Katz, pp. 122-152; Barberi Squarotti, pp. 162-163; Bullock, pp. 92-119; Hughes, *passim*; e Weinstein. Il commento negativo della Ginzburg su *Tutti i nostri ieri* (1:1131) è probabilmente dettato da quel che di eccessivamente strutturato (e ‘architettonico’) c’è in questo romanzo, che è per questo il meno ‘ginzburghiano’ di tutti.

<sup>26</sup> In *Famiglia*, tuttavia, e per la prima volta, l’*alter ego* della Ginzburg è un uomo, Carmine.

<sup>27</sup> La vecchiaia, dice la Ginzburg, è un’età in cui ‘siamo soltanto più spenti e mortificati’ (2:612); essa ‘vorrà dire in noi, essenzialmente, la fine dello stupore’ (2:23).

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## RECENSIONI

*The Cambridge Companion to Piero della Francesca*, ed. Jeryldene M. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Pp. xvi, 268; 94 ill.. ISBN 0-5216-5254-5. (hardback), 0-5216-5472-6. (paper). US. \$75 (hardback), US. \$28 (paper).

The often romanticized interest in the art of Piero della Francesca goes back, as so many things do, to Giorgio Vasari, who decried the so-called theft of Piero's mathematical theories, lamented the loss of so many of his major paintings, and bemoaned his later blindness. Vasari, of course, favoured Piero as a sort of adopted Aretine, thanks to his True Cross cycle in Vasari's hometown of Arezzo. This romanticism was revived in nineteenth-century England, where a new interest in Piero led to a number of publications and the acquisition of several important paintings for enthusiastic London institutions. By the early twentieth century, Post Impressionist taste found much to like in Piero's emphasis on structure and form, increasing his popularity in both Europe and the United States. Since 1927, Roberto Longhi's largely formalist study of the artist has overshadowed much of our understanding of Piero's place in art history. Longhi's evocative book found sympathetic followers in Bernard Berenson, Kenneth Clark, and others, thereby vaunting Piero to the ranks of the most important Renaissance artists. As a painter who spent his entire career as a resident of Sansepolcro, executing his greatest work outside the major centres of Florence and Rome, Piero was an odd choice for such an apotheosis.

This important new volume, edited by Jeryldene M. Wood, goes a long way to dispel many of the resulting assumptions and misconceptions about Piero's art. He is examined with care and in context, using a wide range of methods and bibliographic sources. This volume considers not only Piero's paintings, but also his place in Italian Renaissance art and history. Nine of the ten essays are published here for the first time, although several are based on earlier essays by these same authors. Taken together, they give us an interdisciplinary way to look at Piero, moving away from both romanticism and formalism to a more comprehensive understanding.

Jeryldene M. Wood begins with an introduction to Piero's life and works, establishing the basic chronological parameters and pertinent issues. This is followed by four essays dealing exclusively with Piero's religious paintings. The first, by Diane Cole Ahl, tackles the *Misericordia Altarpiece* (Sansepolcro), placing it firmly within the religious and civic context of the town of Sansepolcro and the charitable confraternity responsible for its commission. Timothy Verdon broadens the perspective to look at Piero's spiritual world more comprehensively, using the *Misericordia Altarpiece* as well as two other early works, *Girolamo Amadi Kneeling Before Saint Jerome* (Venice) and *The Baptism of Christ* (London). Jeryldene M. Wood examines the role of the Franciscan friars in the commission of the True Cross cycle in Arezzo, emphasizing their local history and missionary role. And Marilyn Lavin, in an updated version of a 1995 essay, describes *The Adoration of the Child* (London) as an intensely personal work that reflects aspects of Piero's otherwise hidden personality.

Moving away from this strictly religious focus, the next six essays cover a wider variety of paintings. Jane Bridgeman reinterprets several well-known works through their painted costumes, suggesting new or additional meanings revealed by these seemingly insignificant details. Joanna Woods-Marsden provides an overview of the portraits of *Sigismondo Malatesta* (Paris), *Federigo da Montefeltro* (Florence), and *Battista Sforza* (Florence) within the genre of court portraiture. Philip Jacks looks at the enigmatic *Ideal City* paintings (Urbino, Baltimore, and Berlin) as products of the circle of Florentine intarsia artists working at the Urbino court, dissociating them both from Piero and from contemporary theatrical design. Margaret Daly Davis and J.V. Field discuss Piero as an intellectual and the author of three surviving mathematical treatises, *Trattato d'abaco*, *Libellus de quinque corporibus regularibus*, and *De prospectiva pingendi*, all in the abacus school tradition. The volume ends with Anne Barriault's analysis of Piero's impact on modern art historians, artists, and poets, effectively making us reconsider our own understanding of the artist and the conditions which shape it.

Especially illuminating, to me, was Bridgeman's essay on the ways in which Piero deliberately manipulated his depiction of costume and accessories to further his narratives. For example, according to Bridgeman, the use of white cloth-of-gold for the costume of both Sigismondo Malatesta and Saint Sigismondo in the fresco in the Tempio Malatestiano (Rimini) denotes royalty, since the fabric had long associations with rulers. Bridgeman dates the *Brena Altarpiece* (Milan) to the late 1450s, rather than the more traditional date of circa 1472-74, because of, among other things, the style of Federigo's armor and the absence of his later emblems and awards. And, furthermore, Bridgeman demonstrates how Piero's incorporation of contemporary Greek clothing, especially in the Arezzo frescoes, metaphorically denotes Christian antiquity. Through these observations, Bridgeman opens a window into Piero's compositions which we would not have otherwise. But the lack of any color reproductions, or even black and white details, is problematic, since so much of her discussion depends on close attention to the paintings.

Indeed, it is a shame that this new appraisal of Piero is not accompanied by better reproductions. All illustrations are black and white, and the placement of 29 plates at the front of the volume and additional figures in each article necessitates a great deal of flipping back and forth as one reads. This did not keep the price down, although, fortunately, there is a less costly paperback edition. The volume is part of Cambridge University Press's exemplary Companion series, which thus far covers, in addition to Piero, Masaccio, Delacroix, Velazquez, Vermeer, Giotto, Titian and Giovanni Bellini. These volumes provide accessible overviews of major artists for both art historians and students alike, and serve as a convenient place to find some of the most recent scholarship. But unless something is done about the reproductions and the cost, these important volumes will not make the impact they could.

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*Going for Baroque. Cultural Transformations 1550-1650*, ed. Francesco Guardiani. Ottawa: Legas, 1999. Pp. 190, illustrations. ISBN 0-9212-5288-9.

This volume, comprised of thirteen essays dedicated to aspects of the Baroque, grew out of the St. Michael's College Symposium series. As such, it intends to express the spirit of academic conviviality that characterizes that particular University of Toronto Catholic Liberal Arts College tradition as well as the tradition of serious academic inquiry. It sets high standards for itself as it consciously attempts to link a troubling historical period with the modern and contemporary, while pointing towards the future. This is made boldly evident in the editor's Introduction:

SET BETWEEN THE END OF THE RENAISSANCE and the beginning of the Age of Reason, Baroque has traditionally appeared as a puzzling epoch to the student in arts and science, an age filled with unresolved ambiguities, divisive issues, and unsubstantiated projections of new values to replace established truths. AND YET, IN THIS PERIOD, we find some of the greatest achievements of modern culture in the Western World [...]. (p. 9) [author's emphasis]

By means of these and other typographical variations as well as constant references to Marshall McLuhan, postmodernism, and the Neobaroque, the editor intends to intrigue, engage and perhaps even provoke the reader.

The net is cast rather broadly since the volume's goal is to offer the reader an insight into elements of European culture from approximately 1550 to 1650 and still contextualise these developments from a more current perspective. While Italian culture of the period looms large, the essays collected here are not merely confined to phenomena typical of the peninsula. The discussion of the figurative arts, theatre, music, literature, science, philosophy and religion goes beyond the geographical limitations of Italy and the traditional chronology. Despite the vast scope of this volume, it is not intended to be exhaustive but rather to whet the appetite. Hence, a glance at the papers presented here should entice the potential Italianist reader to pursue further study.

This intention is communicated in the editor's brief "Introduction: An Idea of Baroque." In the first essay, "Point of View: An Intellectual Revolution of the Baroque Age," Joseph Goering jumps directly into a most absorbing aspect of the period by addressing the contention that the artistic mastery of perspective and point of view in the visual arts was accompanied by philosophical, theological and political opinion, thereby creating a "convergence between art and thought" (p. 15). According to Eric McLuhan's essay, "Francis Bacon's Theory of Communication," the scientist's aphoristic style of writing in the *Essays* points to "a scientific technique of keeping knowledge in a state of emergent evolution and thereby of constantly referring it to perception and observation" (p. 25) that becomes of fundamental importance in the analysis of the Book of Life through scriptural exegesis and the Book of Nature through scientific experimentation. Similar concepts run through Domenico Pietropaolo's essay on Galileo and Biblical allegory. Through a careful analysis from the perspective of the representation of immanence and transcendence, Pietropaolo regards Galileo's letters (par-

ticularly the 1615 one to Grand Duchess Christina of Lorraine) as key to his conception of allegory and affirms, “Theology is to the Bible, what physics is to nature, and both are forms of exegesis, that is to say acts of careful reading and interpretation.” (p. 33) Science, revelation and ethics remain linked to this day, and the example of Galileo’s trials and tribulations remain valuable lessons (p. 41). Similarly, history plays a large role in Francesco Guardiani’s essay entitled “Baroque and Neobaroque.” The author claims that we are planted firmly “in the eye of an epochal storm” (p. 43) and in “a period of accelerated cultural transformation” (p. 44). By conjuring Galileo Galilei, Giambattista Marino, Giambattista Vico, Northrop Frye, Marshall McLuhan and Gianni Vattimo, Guardiani presents intriguing arguments for a parallel between the seventeenth century and our current era, or rather, between the Baroque and the Neobaroque. Complementary arguments are detected in John H. Simpson’s essay, “A Scrapbook of Lessons for the Modern from the (New) Baroque: Discontinuity, Gazing, Glancing, Listening.” Here, Walter Benjamin, Paul Klee, Christine Buci-Glucksmann and Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum of Bilbao are potentially (even “spiritually”) linked by “Baroque Multiplicity” in “the twilight of Modernity” (p. 65).

That spiritual link between artistic and scientific developments is also present in Donald J. Lococo’s “Baroque Science: The Lens of Infinity.” Here, the author argues that the knowledge imparted by such scientific discoveries as the telescope and microscope deepened man’s knowledge of the cosmos and changed human consciousness. With the lens as a metaphor, the author claims that those scientific developments “re-defined material reality beyond the sphere of earth to encompass the near-infinite cosmos which pointed to the infinity of God.” (p. 79) These overtly religious themes are further complemented by the following essay, simply entitled, “Jansenism.” Elmar J. Kremer engages in debates surrounding this important movement in seventeenth-century French Catholicism in order to discuss issues related to divine providence, grace and free will in an era beset by religious wars and scientific discoveries that would continue to reverberate for centuries. In “Paolo Sarpi and Canon Law”, Giulio Silano also engages in questions related to the organized Church and matters related to freedom of expression. The seventeenth-century court theologian battled the Roman Curia on behalf of the Republic of Venice regarding the interpretation of canon law and even the right of Church to make laws by divine right (p. 104). What emerges is an important figure who fights for the rights of the individual to strive for truth unhindered by such bodies as the Inquisition. This figure is so intriguing (and so intriguingly dealt with here) because these argumentations were taking place at a time when the pressures of ‘correct’ interpretation were deeply felt and, indeed, even claimed victims. In order to be successful, the author wonders about the degree to which Sarpi and other such figures really were who and what they claimed to be.

The theme of simulation and dissimulation is carried over in the essay, “The Shepherd’s Baroque Nature,” written by Benoît Bolduc. According to the author, the shepherd embodies “some of the most convincing features of the period that we now agree to call ‘baroque’” (p. 112). It is the exceptional liberty of pastoral drama’s intermediate position between tragedy and comedy that attracted so many writers

to the genre. Consequently, the shepherd too “can be just about any type” (p. 121) and therefore may be considered quintessentially baroque. In “Directing Opera in the Italian Baroque,” Anna Migliarisi turns to opera as a perfect reflection of the “impression of unity of the arts on a grand scale” (p. 123). A recently recovered anonymous treatise dealing with directing musical and spoken drama, *Il Corago*, is presented as key to understanding baroque theatre for, although there is some degree of indebtedness to other treatises, this one is “a comprehensive summary of directorial, as well as musical-dramatic, practice in the late Renaissance and early Baroque periods in Italy” (p. 134). Laura Willett’s essay, “Montaigne, Caravaggio and the Conversion of St. Paul,” investigates the significance of the Conversion of St. Paul as a theme for Montaigne’s writings and Caravaggio’s paintings. This subject, drawn from Scripture, was treated frequently by major Renaissance and Baroque painters and also by post-Tridentine writers. Between the literary treatment of Montaigne and the painting of Caravaggio, the author compares the rhetorical techniques and discovers, among other things, “the process of dialectical opposition – clearly a characteristic of baroque mentality” (p. 147). Both are seen as texts that can generate multiple interpretations.

For Ann Dooley who, in “More Broke than Baroque: The Irish Perspective” offers insight into the Baroque in Irish literary tradition, any dialectical opposition must be seen to “struggle for some cleared ground [...] against the cultural model of the imperialism/colonialism dialectic” (p. 156). The Gaelic poetry of Ó Rathaille of the end of the seventeenth century is compared to Spenser’s *Faerie Queen* from the perspectives of self-fashioning, the Reformation/Counter-Reformation struggle and nation building in terms of the “mould of the Gaelic mythos of sovereignty” (p. 167). In a similar vein, the last essay by Randall A. Rosenfeld, entitled “Van Eyck’s *Der Fluyten Lust-hof* (1644-ca.1655) and the Perception of the Baroque,” makes a strong case for a pan-European Baroque culture. According to the critic, this is due to the eclectic nature of the Netherlandish collection, a reflection of the cultural and religious variations from which inspiration was drawn. If there is a political element to it, the author argues, it is perhaps as “a reflection of the tone of Utrecht society, determined in part by the city’s plurality, with its approximate third of Catholics, spread throughout that society” (pp. 183-84).

There is much to praise in this volume, though there are also some points that detract from its general impact. For example, one notices a basic discrepancy between the methods of referencing the sources among the essays’ authors. Further, one cannot help but be distracted by the occasionally poor editorial practice that leads to such passages as the following:

An [sic] so, perhaps, we can turn somewhere else for help, where there is some faith. Northrop Frye has always fascinated me: often when I am stuck with a problem, missing link [sic] in my train of thought, I get the distinct feeling that he has gone through an identical or similar thinking pattern .. [sic] but of course he always has the answer. (p. 45)

Putting these stylistic infelicities aside, on the whole the book makes a positive impact. The initial impression of the randomness and disconnectedness of the

papers may be seen as resulting from the inherent tension and contrasts typical of the period itself and, subsequently, one begins to notice a flow of thought that ties these diverse papers together in order to form a rather thematically tight little volume. True to the etymology of its central theme, *Going for Baroque* may indeed be considered a pearl of irregular beauty.

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*Saints and the Sacred*, eds. Joseph Goering, Francesco Guardiani, and Giulio Silano. Ottawa: Legas, 2001. Pp. 225. ISBN 1-8945-0817-3.

This collection of thirteen essays is derived from the third St. Michael's College Symposium, held in February of 2000. "An Idea of Sanctity" is the provocatively titled introduction to *Saints and the Sacred*, a volume that introduces the reader to the complexities of a notion as sublime and intangible as sanctity. The introduction anticipates the tone of the following essays and directs us "to think of the effortless dramatic actions of the saints as an expression of a life that is not merely natural, a life that goes beyond human nature, a life that, therefore, becomes supernatural, and so most fully human" (10). Once initiated into this philosophical realm, the purpose of the symposium is affirmed by Christopher Potworoski's inquiry in his essay: "The Theologian and the 'Little Way'." He asks: "How can theologians benefit from the life and experience of the saints?" (136). In light of this query the essays can be read as an examination of the lives of the saints and the lessons to be learned from them. The Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar suggests in the same article that the saint's life is a presentation to his own age of the message that heaven is sending to it and is a way to approach the perennial truth of Christ (136). Applying this argument to the theological study of saints' lives allows us to gain a more nuanced understanding of the historical *milieu* in which they lived and something of the religious practice of that period.

This volume seeks to initiate the reader into a world of highly focused theological and research based topics of discussion. Jacalyn Duffin's exploration of origin and meaning in the cult of saints Cosmas and Damian in Toronto, Canada, uses an intriguing socio-historical research method involving personal experiences, surveys, and interviews as well as liturgical and lay literature as sources. Awad Eddie Halabi examines origins in his essay on the Islamic shrine and annual festival of the Prophet Moses in the Medieval Islamic period. Again, we are presented with an extensive body of research, though interestingly this time of non-Christian sources, which examines contemporary chronicles discussing Sultan Baybars' construction of the shrine and the early performances of the festival. In his conclusion the author explains how this research advances our understanding of the dynamics existing between popular religious beliefs and state-sponsored religious practices. The volume then moves to two works focusing on issues of traditional allegorical interpretation and on the "wilderness motif" respectively. Domenico Pietropaolo's essay "The Zodiac Saints" refers to the stellar cartography of Julius Schiller and

devotes much attention to the tension between science and religion during the Counter Reformation; it also analyses the traditional use of allegory as a tool of “cultural appropriation and dominance.” Riener Jaakson’s focus on “Wilderness as a Sacred Place” seamlessly brings together references from the Bible to Heidegger, from the Chinese geographer Yi-Fu Tuan to contemporary perceptions of the natural. Jaakson’s work also brings to mind Northern Romantic paintings and evokes works such as those of Caspar David Friedrich.

The next three essays are each devoted to an individual saint and their influential connections to a particular holy location, object, or behaviour. The thorough examination of the history of these saints’ lives provides a vehicle for a greater understanding of their last impact on the cultural and social *milieu*. It is from the lives of the saints that we acquire insight into the architectural decoration of Southwell Minister in Coffman’s essay on Eadburg of Repton or into the importance of musical accompaniment to Santa Caterina da Bologna’s intonations in Rosenfeld’s paper. Furthermore, Eric Graff’s article on the establishment of the first Brigettine monastery in England gives the reader a rare glimpse into the international politico-religious workings of the early fifteenth century. This paper carefully describes the letter of Katillus, an early Brigettine brother in England, to the Confessor General of Vadstena in Sweden to explain how this valuable source elucidates details about the spread of the cult into England and how Katillus justified his argument regarding the appropriation of goods reserved for the poor. This is a fascinating window into a complex debate on Church canon that echoes the discussion on sanctity in the introduction of this publication.

Joseph Goering’s re-examination of a twelfth century cult and Francesco Guardiani’s analysis of the baroque poem *L’Adone* both demonstrate independent thought and careful argumentation. Goering’s compelling investigation of the Cult of the Virgin and the Grail communicates his enthusiasm and great affinity for the subject. Similarly, we are witness to Guardiani’s adept interpretive skills and his understanding of the Baroque mind that enable him to translate nuanced layers of meaning in Marino’s poem. Without being pedantic, Christopher Potworoski’s essay on Saint Thérèse of Lisieux successfully prepares his reader by giving a brief explanation and history of his subject. He clearly sets his objective regarding the ways in which saints in the Catholic Church are “signals” to the faithful and how they act as a point of reference for those involved in theological research or teaching. Potworoski’s essay achieves this objective through careful interpretations of the conversations of Sainte Thérèse. He also makes reference to the French Dominican theologian and medievalist Marie-Dominique Chenu who emphasized the role of faith in theology and the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar who argues that each saint is given a particular mission to throw light on one forgotten or neglected aspect of revelation. We can read this volume in similar terms; as each author’s attempt to illuminate the stories, myths, and representations of Christian and non-Christian tradition.

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*The Flight of Ulysses. Studies in Memory of Emmanuel Hatzantonis*, ed. Augustus A. Mastri. Chapel Hill, NC: Annali d'italianistica, 1997. Pp. 359. ISBN 0-9657-9560-8.

This collection of short essays of literary criticism covers a considerable range of topics of interest to Italianisti. Compiled in memory of Emmanuel Hatzantonis, who died more than 10 years ago now, the volume refers in its title to this scholar's origins in Greece and the peregrinations of his career which took him to City College of New York, Perugia, Columbia University, Berkeley, and finally the University of Oregon. It also alludes to one of his own literary interests, *The Odyssey*. Of special interest for Hatzantonis was the *fortuna* of the myth of Circe, the sorceress whom Ulysses met on his wanderings. Though Hatzantonis wrote on both ancient and modern Greek literature, his publications demonstrate that he was at least as devoted to Italian authors (e.g. Dante, Verga and Pirandello) and, to a lesser extent, Spanish ones (e.g. Cervantes and Lope de Vega). The selective bibliography of Hatzantonis' publications provided here (16-17) shows that he also pursued in his own writings the same sort of chronological span in subjects exhibited by this collection. There appears to have been some effort by the impressive lineup of contributors to address scholarly concerns shared by Hatzantonis. However, this substantial variety may also somewhat limit the market for the book, though it will certainly remain of sufficient interest for libraries and any specialists with similarly wide-ranging expertise.

The Three Crowns of Florence are well-represented with four items on Dante, two on Petrarch and three on Boccaccio. Gino Casagrande traces the evolution of a single word in “Cera’ nei poeti del Duecento e in Dante: una proposta per *Rime* 22 (LXIX), 7.” The remaining three pieces on Dante might all be said to treat in one way or another the question of Dante's poetics: Tibor Wlassics suggests that the beginning of the *Comedy* is “an experiment in medieval surrealistic storytelling” (35); Antonio Illiano examines Dante's use of figura, with particular attention to the symbolism of the characters Virgil and Cato; Tonia Caterina Riviello considers “The Purpose and Obligations of Poetry” in light of modern theories of epistemology and psychology. The contributions on Petrarch and Boccaccio include: Antonino Musumeci, “Petrarca: l'immagine, il deserto e la scrittura”; Paolo Cherchi, “Dispositio' e significato del sonetto LXVII”; Natalia Costa-Zalessow, “Numerical Symmetry among the Ten Narrators of The Decameron” and Regina Psaki, “Boccaccio and Female Sexuality: Gendered and Eroticized Landscapes.”

After the giants of the Trecento (the volume is chronologically ordered), the attention to specific authors or periods becomes rather more spread out. Edoardo Lèbano's comparison of “The Three Longest Duels in Italian Chivalric Literature” overlaps with this early period and takes M. M. Boiardo's *Orlando innamorato* as its latest example (though not as late as the misprint “Boiardo wrote this poem between 1476 and 1582” might imply). That Isabella di Morra (b. c. 1520) was able to produce any poetry in her tragically short life (she was murdered by her brothers for exchanging love letters with a Spanish noble) is surprising, as is the fact that any of the work survives; her young longings for fame are the subject of an offering by Paola Malpezzi-Price.

A sub-current running through the collection is the subject of some of the issues raised by translation (fitting, perhaps, since Hatzantonis' publications, like the papers in this volume, are approximately evenly split between Italian and English). Peter Bondanella, writing from experience, shares his observations on "Translating *The Decameron*" while Robert Rodini considers a number of translations of Michelangelo into English, focussing on one of his sonnets. Augustus Pallotta investigates the earliest translator into English of *I Promessi Sposi*, Charles Swan, as a representative of the British national perception of Italy in the nineteenth century. Egidio Lunardi, like Bondanella, revisits the translation challenges for an author whom he himself has partly translated: the poet Giovanni Pascoli.

Nearly half of the essays (13 of 28) treat modern authors and topics (1800 to the present). Aldo Scaglione takes up what he calls a landmark in "the literary evolution of self analysis" in his piece "Kierkegaard's Either/Or: Another Case of Emergence of the Interior 'I'." Scaglione offers a thumbnail sketch of the history of introspection in literature, placing Kierkegaard in a *continuum* that includes Chrétien de Troyes, Petrarch, Alberti, Cellini, Montaigne, and Pascal, through to Dostoevsky and Tolstoy.

For the eighteenth century, Franco Fido offers a study on "Tempo della città, tempo del teatro" in Goldoni; Patrizio Rossi takes up a subject of interest to Croce, the *Italienische Reise* of Goethe; and Gustavo Costa considers "Giambattista Vico Between Pre- and Postmodernity." Jumping to the nineteenth century, another of Hatzantonis' major pursuits, Giovanni Verga, is treated in a pair of articles by Olga Ragusa ("Manzoni, Verga e il problema della lingua") and Tullio Pagano ("L'Assommoir e I Malavoglia"). Additional papers include: Mario Aste, "Echoes of 'Verismo' in Deledda's *La chiesa della solitudine*"; Giuseppe Bolognese, "Per la genesi dei *Giganti* di Pirandello: congettura del testo italiano de *Gli dei della montagna* di Dunsany"; Barbara Zaczek, "Guido Piovene's *Lettere di una novizia: Misreading a Nun*"; Gian-Paolo Biasin, "Lassù sulle montagne" (on Paola Drigo's novel *Maria Zef*).

Three essays on Italian film have been included: Raffaele Lampugnani, "Regional Identity, Amoral Familism and Social Integration in Visconti's *Rocco e i suoi fratelli*"; Sante Matteo, "When Snow Was Snowier and Roads Were Roadier, and We All Loved Each Other So Much"; and Vincenzo E. De Nardo, "Pirandellian Notions of Identity in Scola's *Macaroni*." These pieces, like the essay with which the book concludes (Franco Ricci, "Disenfranchisement, or 'Your Life or Your Life!'"), largely revolve around themes of memory, community and identity, both in Italy as well as among Italians living abroad. A short preface is provided by the editor, Augustus Mastri, which reviews Hatzantonis' publications and Joseph Tusiani provides a memorial poem in Latin and Italian. A posthumous tribute is always tinged with a certain poignancy; one can only imagine that Hatzantonis would have been pleased with this fine collection.

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*Naples in the Eighteenth Century: The Birth and Death of a Nation State*, ed. Girolamo Imbruglia. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2000. Pp. ix, 204. ISBN 0-5216-3116-1.

This collection of essays analyzes the history of the Neapolitan state during the height of the Enlightenment. Naples was one of many kingdoms across Europe that witnessed a dramatic struggle between philosophes who wished to reinvent society, and traditionalists who sought to preserve the *status quo*. The strength of this volume lies in its explanation of why, even as it was often a hotbed of new cultural ideas, the Kingdom of Two Sicilies was unable to modernize itself politically and economically. No single culprit exists, but the combination of ecclesiastical resistance, baronial arrogance, popular suspicion, and monarchical incompetence resulted in an ineffective state. The consequences of this failure continue to haunt portions of southern Italy today. For more than two centuries after 1503 Naples was ruled by a Spanish viceroy and was then transferred to Austrian control in 1707. In this volume, all of the authors focus on the period between 1734, when Don Carlos of Bourbon ascended to the throne of a newly-independent monarchy, and 1799, when the Parthenopean Republic flowered and died within the same year.

This volume is the twentieth book in the successful series 'Cambridge Studies in Italian History and Culture.' The series has contributed to a wider understanding of Italian history by publishing monographs and essay collections that range from the late Middle Ages to the Risorgimento. This collection fits squarely into that tradition by showcasing the work of Italian scholars who might otherwise remain unknown to the English-speaking world. Most of the authors are established scholars with books of their own: Anna Maria Rao and Antonino De Francesco each edited an edition of Vincenzo Cuoco's important work on the Neapolitan Revolution, Maria Grazia Maiorini wrote a book on the administration of justice under the Bourbons, and Girolamo Imbruglia (the editor) has published several articles and another edited volume on historiography. All but one of the nine essays was translated into English; there are, however, occasional infelicities when the use of academic jargon or exceptionally long sentences make the prose difficult to wade through. A list of authors, their institutional affiliations, and their research specialties would have been useful in the back of the book, particularly because Cambridge University Press explicitly declares its desire to have these scholars and their work more widely-known in the English-speaking world. The authors assume a good deal of prior knowledge about the Enlightenment, which makes the articles suitable for specialists in that era but of less utility to Italian historians of a different period. One notable exception is the essay by Anna Maria Rao on feudalism and the judiciary, which is exceptionally clear and takes pains to introduce historical figures and Neapolitan institutions unknown to a general reader.

*Naples in the Eighteenth Century* takes a balanced approach with essays that focus on politics, economics, jurisprudence, music, and academia. The first essay, by Maria Grazia Maiorini, offers an overview of the political situation from the

accession of an independent Bourbon monarch in 1734 to the fall of the republic in 1799. Maiorini demonstrates that the barons and other elites, inside the city and especially in the rural provinces, provided an enormous obstacle to the reform programs. As one might expect, the creation (and effective governance) of a modern administrative state declined in direct proportion to the distance from the capital. Giovanni Montroni then describes the Neapolitan Court in detail, tracing the intricate hierarchy of the nobility in the earlier eighteenth century and the gradual dominance of the Crown by 1800. Although it is useful to know more about how the new king represented his sovereignty, some of Montroni's conclusions seem rather obvious. It should not surprise us that "the good favor of the sovereign could guarantee social advancement" (23) or that the Court was a place where groups previously opposed to each other might become linked. His discussion of the knightly orders of San Gennaro and of San Carlo, on the other hand, provides a compelling and concrete example of how the king gradually tamed the nobility. Biagio Salvemini mixes economic analysis with interesting tidbits about the crops imported and exported by the Kingdom of Naples as he explains how it gradually fell further and further behind the economies of northern Europe. Despite valiant efforts by the reformers, the southern economy could not adapt to the commercial revolution nor could the monarchy compete with the centralized nation-states of England and France.

Girolamo Imbruglia summarizes the failure of Enlightenment ideas in Naples chiefly through a description of the major intellectual figures such as Antonio Genovesi, Giovanni Maria Galanti, and Gaetano Filangieri (Giambattista Vico is deliberately absent). While these men represented the peaks of intellectual thought in the mid-eighteenth century, most Neapolitans were "struck by the mediocrity of their own intellectual life" (84). This theme is expanded upon by Elvira Chiosi in a short essay entitled "Intellectuals and Academies." Chiosi reviews the different associations and institutions designed to promote intellectual life, scientific knowledge, and economic reform. There was no shortage of intellectual outlets in Naples: ecclesiastical seminaries, royal academies, the university, and scientific associations, to name only a few. Yet nearly all of these were hamstrung in their efforts to advance intellectual inquiry and Enlightenment ideas. Some were overly ambitious and squandered their resources on grandiose palaces, others were limited by restrictive statutes or personality disputes, and still others were hindered by fierce polemics between church and state. The end result, however, was usually the same: Naples could not put reforms into practice and thus failed to implement the necessary political and economic changes.

Renato di Benedetto offers a dense, technical history of music and theatre in eighteenth-century Naples, focusing in particular on opera. Naples was justly famous for its contributions to both classical opera and the *opera buffa*. Di Benedetto analyzes the contributions of various individuals (Pietro Napoli Signorelli, Saverio Mattei, Antonio Planelli) to such success. He argues that "the history of reform in music seems to have marched in step with that of society and politics" (151), thus linking his own essay with the broader theme of the volume. Naples was perhaps best known in the later eighteenth century for the unearthing

of Pompeii and Herculaneum, so the subject of antiquarian studies, and especially the rise of new comparative disciplines of intellectual inquiry, constitutes the basis of Alain Schnapp's essay. Modern archaeology and ethnology, Schnapp suggests, were the results of a transformation away from "curiosities" and represented a "fresh way of looking at antiquity" (157). This sparked a hunt for antiquities throughout the eastern Mediterranean. The final essay is Antonino De Francesco's provocatively-titled "How Not to Finish a Revolution", which examines the short-lived Jacobin Republic in 1799. He notes several interesting comparisons between the French and Neapolitan Revolutions, but the essay lacks a clear argument. The bicentennial of the Neapolitan Revolution several years ago sparked a wave of new books, in both Italian and English, which might prove a more useful guide to the events of that era.

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*Niccolò Tommaseo e Firenze. Atti del convegno di studi, Firenze, 12-13 febbraio 1999*, eds. Roberta Turchi, Alessandro Volpi. Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 2000. Pp. xi, 384. ISBN 8-8222-4894-5.

Tommaseo's memories of his first weeks in Florence where, at the invitation of Giampietro Vieusseux, he had gone in 1827 from Milan were not happy ones. He wrote in his *Memorie poetiche* (1838) that "il primo soggiorno in una città, fra nuovi uomini e nuove cose, fu sempre triste a me, quel di Firenze tristissimo". But seven years later, from his self imposed exile in France that had come about when Vieusseux's *Antologia* was suppressed for political reasons, his attitude was quite different. In a poignant letter to one of his closest friends, Gino Capponi, Tommaseo expresses his longing for the city: "oh, dov'è la mia Firenze, e i miei giorni fitti nel pensiero, e il mio pensiero italiano tutto?" (Tommaseo e Capponi, *Carteggio inedito*, 29 May 1834).

The events of Tommaseo's life and career that led to his nostalgic embrace of Florence and eventually, after all the tumultuous undertakings of a career as author, poet, pedagogue, linguist, philosopher, apologist for Christianity, to permanent residence in Florence is the focus of this recent collection of essays.

The 19 studies, divided into three sections entitled respectively "Il pensiero politico e religioso", 'L'Opera letteraria e linguistica" and "La vicenda biografica", offer us an Italian and also, on a larger scale, a European overview, of Tommaseo's accomplishments and attitudes in the city he loved above all others. In Florence were his best friends, his most notable literary achievements and much much later, his beloved family. However, as the preface justly indicates, Tommaseo's contact with Florence expanded far beyond the city and had a seminal effect on the definition of an Italian "national" language, a concept towards which the Dalmatian author worked assiduously, in blindness, in poverty, in old age, until his death in 1874.

The opening essay by Franco della Peruta, "Nazionalità e Risorgimento fino alla rivoluzione del '48," sets the historical ambience in which Tommaseo operat-

ed in the years between his sojourns in Florence. These were years in which, as the following piece, "Vita civile e storia nazionale. Tommaseo e i moderati toscani," by Luigi Mascilli Migliorini, Tommaseo's concept of Italianness is formed, as together with his contemporaries Manzoni and Sismondi he reaches back into the Middle Ages to find the origins of an Italian identity. These are the years of his study of Dante, and of his historical *novellas*. These are also the years of his intensive reflection on the role of the Church and of the Catholic religion on the political environment in Italy, as Guido Verucci points out in the essay following. Verucci shows how the works of Tommaseo at this time reflect the influence of his friendship with Antonio Rosmini. Politics and faith are concepts that frame Tommaseo's reflections on the Slavic peoples as well; ever mindful of his deep respect for his roots, and especially for his mother, Tommaseo never forgot that he came from the Dalmatian coast. The anthology contains several other essays that deal with Tommaseo and his relationship with his Dalmatian roots, including "Il destino dei popoli slavi nella prospettiva europea di Niccolò Tommaseo" by Arduino Agnelli, "La scoperta della poesia popolare" by Giovanni Battista Bronzini and "Tommaseo e la Serbia" by Nikša Stipčević. The sociopolitical observations of the first essay regarding the Slavic peoples complement the more literary assertions and comments of the latter two, and certainly all three pieces elucidate Tommaseo's belief that "[p]roprio i popoli, che più hanno sofferto e più a lungo sono stati privati della libertà, possono...mantenere una purezza di spirito, che gli altri hanno perduto" (105). Clearly, as Raffaele Ciampini had already ably demonstrated in his *Vita di Niccolò Tommaseo* (Firenze, 1945), Tommaseo included himself among this group, both in his acquired Italianness and in his Slavic roots. One curiosity among these three essays is the omission of the work done on Tommaseo, as regards his enquiries and interest into matters Slavic, by the *Rivista dalmatica* which has always promoted him as being of Dalmatian origin.

Tommaseo as author is the focus of the third section of this collection. He is represented in two ways: as narrator and poet, and also as journalist (for lack of a better term). Tommaseo had no family fortune to support his writing endeavours, as had many of his contemporaries and friends. In fact, he remained, until death, a man of limited means, among whose letters we find reference, near the end of his life, to a cravat that he was still wearing at that time, although he had acquired it, and already second-hand at that, in 1838. When we realize how much Tommaseo depended on writing for his livelihood, Roberta Turchi's opening in her essay on the author's contributions to Viesseux's *Antologia* becomes all the more meaningful, although the essay takes an academic and critical approach. Turchi quotes a letter of September 1823 in which Viesseux writes to Giacomo Leopardi that Tommaseo "lavora sempre molto; ed anche troppo, e soprattutto troppo presto." The alacrity of his production may have slowed down in later years, but his prolific output certainly did not. It was, in fact, by dint of unrelenting and hard work that Tommaseo earned his place in the world of Italian letters as the essays of Donatella Martinelli ("Il Nuovo dizionario de' sinonimi della lingua italiana, da Milano a Firenze"), Massimo Fanfani ("Niccolò Tommaseo e

l'Accademia della Crusca") and Giorgio Bärberi Squarotti ("Il Vocabolario del Tommaseo") confirm.

The closing essays of the book expand and comment on the biographical information we have of Tommaseo. Aglaia Paoletti Langé addresses Tommaseo's earliest years in Florence, Marco Cini his exile, Veronica Gabbielli the last years of his life, from 1859-1874. This was the period when he took up permanent residence in the city. Marco Cignotti studies Tommaseo's relationship with various Florentine publishers, including Vieusseux, Le Monnier and Barbèra. Virgilio Missori's essay stands out for its presentation and analysis of Tommaseo's copious correspondences while Arnaldo Colasanti focuses on the problematic *Diario intimo*, which he concludes, is an inspired book (362). Here Tommaseo, with great agility, manipulates truths and desires, but leaves us, nonetheless, with what Colasanti calls 'the gift of familiarity' (363).

Obvious in these last few essays, more than in the others, is the sense that Tommaseo remains a beloved, respected figure, despite his difficult nature. Colassanti writes that "[l]a parola in Tommaseo è esorbitante, è un dominio. Ma le parole, per noi uomini, sono anche l'unica cosa che abbiamo: occorre amarle, cercarle, rispettarle" (371). In these words is the spirit of Tommaseo's life work, a spirit that remains long after his death, and that the authors of the essays in this fine volume have captured and respected.

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Doumanis, Nicholas. *Italy. Inventing the Nation Series*. NY: Oxford University Press/ London: Arnold, 2001. Pp. x, 190. ISBN 0-3406-9161-1. US. \$39.95.

The Inventing the Nation Series seeks to show how various geographic communities have forged themselves into nations, bringing various peoples into the fold of a similar set of identities, a shared past, and a sense of a common future. As the series editor, Keith Robbins, as well as the author point out, Italy is one of the best European examples of such a conscious effort in creating a nation. Despite current abhorrence for 'nationalism'—a term hallmarked by xenophobia and intolerance during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries—this sentiment was effectively employed by many countries in the modern era to unite diverse peoples. While this process was often deliberate, it had to appear natural; according to Doumanis, 'for an invented nation to be seen as legitimate, the very fact that it *was* constructed had to be concealed.'

Aware of the dangers inherent in attempting to explain something as intangible as 'identity', Doumanis explores the material evidence for the building of *italianità*. Working chronologically, he discusses the various factors, such as inter-state politics and capitalism, that led to the beginning of the revolts in the nineteenth century. In the first chapter, he briefly describes what he terms as the nation's pre-history, c. 1000-1796. Although history would be one of the two major backbones

of an Italian identity—geography providing the strongest evidence for ‘Italy’—it is not to this period that Italian propagandists would turn. Rather, the imperial world of the Roman empire inspired those seeking to build Italy and Italians.

The break from the past and the beginning of nationhood for Italy began, in fact, with the French Revolution and Napoleonic rule, although perhaps not in the expected ways. Napoleon did create a nation called ‘Italia’, but his oppressive rule left the people of that nation rejecting Italia and nationhood. Doumanis notes that his most significant impact, nonetheless, was to break the mould of the *ancien régime* in Italy. The French governmental systems would provide the foundation for future administrations.

Doumanis divides what was once taught as ‘Risorgimento’ into two parts: ‘the birth of Italian nationalism’, 1814–1847 and the physical ‘unification of Italy, 1848–1860.’ Following the current trend in historiography, he does not refer to the period following the *epoca francese* to the war of unification in 1859–60 as the ‘Age of Risorgimento.’ Known to most students of Italian history as the age of men like Giuseppe Mazzini, Camillo di Cavour, Giuseppe Garibaldi, Massimo D’Azeglio, and Carlo Cattaneo, this period of poverty, debt, and outlawry provided the necessary social turmoil to support the revolts during the middle of the century that would oust foreign domination. Sensitive to the contributions that the period *did* make to the unification process, nevertheless, Doumanis shows how effectively myths could be made out of an altered reality. While Mazzini made easy fodder for a founding myth as the father of Italian nationalism, Cavour abhorred the idea of a unified Italy. He and others like him would later be recast as patriots in order to foster the sense of ontological inevitability—every myth needs a hero. However, as Garibaldi proved, even heroes could be seen as dangerous to the state. His unexpected military success in the south had the Piedmontese monarchy fearful of his supporters, so much so that when they decided to wrest the Veneto from the Austrians, who struggled against Prussia, they did not include their most talented military general.

Ultimately, the physical unification of Italy was at first Piedmontese domination. The House of Savoy appeared as the lesser of foreign evils as they claimed lands in the north and south, excepting Rome (held by France until 1870) and the Veneto (held by Austria until 1866), for themselves. They did, however, contribute desperately needed, and even greedily sought after, effective administration after decades of corruption and incompetence. D’Azeglio’s famous words ‘we have made Italy, now we must make Italians’ accurately portray the condition of Italy after the physical unification. Moreover, characteristics, at least from the outside, that had always defined the people, such as language and religion, obstructed rather than assisted in building Italy. The new government was decidedly against using religion, mostly because the Catholic church was at the best of times indifferent to the Italian state, and more often than not, openly antagonistic. Language, although eventually a unifying element, could not play a significant role when three-quarters of the population was illiterate and spoke only regional dialects.

The history of Italy after the Great War and during Mussolini and the Second World War is perhaps too well known to necessitate details. Whereas earlier Doumanis had

shown the various other paths that Italians could have chosen, here he perhaps falls prey to the idea of inevitability, as indeed he portrays Mussolini's rise to power. What is refreshing, however, in the overview of the period, is the author's focus on the Italian identity. The two wars and the interim with Mussolini are described in regards to how they affected Italy and *italianità*. Mussolini himself represented the epitome of the Italian male—patriotic, masculine, youthful, and powerful. Even when Italians would reject fascism after the war, these ideals would remain.

The final chapter, 'Nationhood without Nationalism', discusses thematically the rise of various political parties within the new government, ending with a discussion of the *Lega Nord*—a group formed in 1991 that often called for the separation of the north from the south of the peninsula. Doumanis notes in his introduction that 'nationhood in Italy begins life as a foreign import.' In many ways, that is how he ends his work as well. Italy, as compared to the rest of the world, is a coherent and recognizable entity. Inside this entity, however, Italians still define themselves by their regional localities.

Doumanis limits himself to English works in the bibliography, which is helpfully divided into themes like 'Risorgimento Italy' and 'Italy after Fascism'. This text and, indeed, series can be likened to the many others that have emerged in the past decade that serve as advanced, thematic textbooks. Few footnotes and a congenial writing style make this work ideal for those both familiar and unfamiliar with Italian history, as well as scholars interested in the social questions of 'identity' and 'nation'.

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*Theatre and the Visual Arts*, eds. Giuliana Sanguinetti Katz, Vera Golini and Domenico Pietropaolo. Ottawa: Legas, 2001. Pp. 296. Fig. 88. ISBN 1-8945-0828-9.

The objective of this collection of essays is to "stress the interrelationship between drama, literature, history and the visual arts from different perspectives" (p. 8). The best essays do more than that: they illuminate and articulate the complex interaction of drama, society, intellectual movements and the arts in various historical periods. The eighteen essays fall into clusters: five focus on Medieval or Renaissance drama, three on Gabriele d'Annunzio's *La figlia di Iorio*, and six on drama in the second half of the twentieth century. Eleven of the essays focus on Italian theatre, and four are written in Italian. The collection presents selected papers from a colloquium held in 1999 at the Graduate Centre for the Study of Drama at the University of Toronto, co-sponsored by the Centre, the Department of Italian Studies at the University of Toronto and the Italian Cultural Institute of Toronto. The collection is uneven, ranging from the magisterial analysis of the genesis of *La figlia di Iorio* by Paolo Puppa, to discussions that are narrow in scope and consequence. A perfunctory introduction summarizes each essay.

Given the temporal and geographic breadth of the collection, it should prove useful in a survey of the history of theatre. Many of the essays will also be of interest to the general reader. For example, Nancy Copeland's examination of the "language" of costumes in Restoration plays at the Stratford Festival prompts her to offer an important critique of the current festival, described as "a standardized product suited to an industrial model of theatrical production ... which contributes to the unfortunate perception of the (Restoration) era and its plays as frivolous and decadent, but not particularly significant" (pp. 134-135). Eric Csapo's fascinating essay entitled "The First Artistic Representations of Theatre: Dramatic Illusion and Dramatic Performance in Attic and South Italian Art" sheds light on the interrelationship of drama, the visual arts, and society in Antiquity. Observing theatre (mostly scenes from Aristophanes' comedies) as it is represented in Attic vase painting, Csapo compares interpretive decisions in fifth-century Athens and fourth-century Sicily. Athenian artists' "scenes" suggest that plays were understood as representations of archetypical or mythic stories; vase paintings portray elements of the stories without reference to theatrical artifice. In Sicily, signs of the theatre accompany the referents, which may point to a fundamental shift in the perception of reality between the fifth and fourth centuries; Csapo proposes that fourth-century Greeks were "more inclined to contemplate the phenomenal world than to look through and beyond it" (p. 37).

Konrad Eisenbichler's article, "Depicting Theatre: Contemporary Evidence for Renaissance Sets in Renaissance Italy," challenges the notion that Renaissance theatrical sets resembled the elaborate drawings by the sixteenth-century architect Sebastiano Serlio, or even surviving accounts of exceptional stagings. Scant information is available on scenery, but evidence points to its simplicity and versatility, appropriate to productions that tended to be "carnival and summertime entertainments at informal gatherings of friends or at convents or confraternal meetings for members of the group (p. 53)". An investigation of the woodcuts in early editions of the plays, confraternal archives recording feast-day entertainment, and the meticulous notes on expenditures and inventories by confraternity accountants should yield a better sense of theatre sets employed in ordinary fifteenth- or sixteenth-century production. In a second essay on Renaissance theatre, Anna Migliarsi analyses Leone De Sommi's *Quattro dialoghi in materia di rappresentazioni sceniche* (1565), and makes a convincing case that the Mantuan, also known as Leone Ebreo, wrote the first comprehensive guide to theatre direction several centuries before the late eighteenth century, generally cited for the emergence of the genre. Theatrical impresario at the Gonzaga court in Mantua between 1556 and 1592, Leone Ebreo offers his systematic observations on the multiple artistic and technical decisions that endow the body of the play with a soul. His vocabulary may differ, but Leone Ebreo's theoretical guidelines often approach those of modern directors. In the final essay on the Renaissance, Mary Alexandra Watt questions the role of plays in festival entertainment, and inevitably our own assumptions concerning the primacy of the written word. Her test case is Poliziano's *Orfeo*, one of the first works to treat a secular theme in the vernacular, which is never mentioned in surviving records of festival entertainment. The play,

if performed, figured as part of the festival's visual delight, Poliziano's words assuming preeminence only in an afterlife accorded the work by the printing press and erudite reader.

The three essays on *La figlia di Iorio*, Gabriele d'Annunzio's rustic tragedy first produced in 1904, offer a rich portrait of the Italian theatrical, intellectual and artistic world at the turn of the century. A history of the production of the work, from its reading by d'Annunzio for the original cast of actors and tragic recitation by Eleonora Duse in her bed when she realized that she would not play the part of Mila, to the present, is discussed in an essay by Enzo Zappulla. Zappulla's citation of letters and reviews bring immediacy and intimacy to his analysis. The tragedy met with enormous success, both in Italian and in the Sicilian translation by Giuseppe Antonio Borghese. The circumstances of the translation and first Sicilian production are described in "La figlia di Iorio di Gabriele d'Annunzio fra lingua e dialetto," by Sarah Zappulla Muscarà, who explores the linguistic qualities of the Borghese's version to explain its triumph. Paolo Puppa traces d'Annunzio's attitude towards the masses which evolved from distant hostility to the idealization of a people rooted in a mystic dynamism as the engine of the nation. *La figlia di Iorio*, Puppa argues, provides "a key for reconstructing one of the ideological underground movements that later flowed into Fascism: the *nazional-populismo rurale*, which rose out of the learned classes" (p. 179). Micheiti is the most prominent influence on d'Annunzio, one of a host of artists and intellectuals who figure in this evocation of an intellectual era.

Several other essays will interest the general reader as well as the specialist, including Anne Urbancic's "Cinematic Techniques and Stereotypes in the Stories of Annie Vivanti," which describes the integration of the cinematic "eye" in Vivanti literary work and the writer's playful but wary appreciation for the seductive new medium. Three notable essays explore the stage as a forum to tackle and disentangle philosophical, aesthetic and psychological problems: Luca Somigli discusses the experimental theatre of Alberto Savinio, Debora Tihanyi focuses on Oskar Sclemmer's Bauhaus ballet, and Giuliana Sanguinetti Katz analyses the radical and riveting interpretation of Schoenberg's Freudian opera *Erwartung* by Lepage. *Theatre and the Visual Arts* reminds us that truly vital theatre presents and ponders our most complex social, philosophical and aesthetic questions.

LAURIE SHEPARD

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Klopp, Charles. *Sentences: The Memoirs and Letters of Italian Political Prisoners from Benvenuto Cellini to Aldo Moro*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999. Pp. xv, 276. \$ 55. ISBN 0-8020-4456-5.

Prison writing constitutes a small yet significant part in the vast fabric of Italian literature.

The writers examined in this volume were primarily members of an intellectual elite that was sent to prison not for having acted against the criminal code,

but for having opposed the ruling power to whom they were subject. While imprisonment served to detain them physically, it could not prevent them from writing (usually clandestinely) of their experience, nor from appealing to a private (and then public) audience outside the prison walls. While many writers left prison ostensibly untouched by the experience, others perished within its walls leaving only their written words. Klopp examines an extensive corpus of memoirs and letters written by diverse Italian political prisoners from the Renaissance to the late 1970s. What interests Klopp about these writings is the tradition these texts embody and the social history they reflect.

*Sentences* is divided into six richly documented chapters representing authors from various historical periods. In the first chapter “Predecessors: Prison writing before 1800,” Klopp presents the reader with four authors from the Renaissance and Baroque period who wrote of their experience in confinement: Cellini, Tasso, Casanova and the fictional memoirs of Giuseppe Pignata as told by Pierre Marteau. Cellini, Pignata and Casanova were not famous for what they wrote about their stay in prison, but rather for how they managed to escape. Tasso, on the other hand, who was incarcerated in Ferrara’s Ospedale di Sant’Anna, becomes the reference point for all those who struggled to keep a grip on their reason while straddling between sane and insane, life and death. In the following chapter “The Spielberg: Concealment and Refutation,” the first true generation of prison writers, the patriots of the Risorgimento, are introduced. Most of the authors examined here wrote of their experience in the Spielberg, the foreboding Austrian citadel prison in the city of Brno (in today’s Czech Republic). Great emphasis is given to Silvio Pellico and to his memoirs *Le mie prigioni*, which served as a standard model for prison writing until it was superseded by Gramsci’s *Lettere dal carcere*. Not only did his memoirs quickly gain popularity, they also prompted fellow inmates to write their own memoirs.

The next chapter, “Bodies Politic,” focuses on patriots from other regions and social levels (excluding peasants). Klopp includes the case of “the eleven martyrs of Mantua,” focusing on the letters of two of the doomed prisoners, Carlo Poma and Enrico Tazzoli, and on those of Luigi Pastro, a fellow inmate not part of the group. The situation of the Bourbon prison in the South as described by the writings of Castromediano, Settembrini, and Spaventa, paints a grim picture of prisons run by the Camorra, with political prisoners confined alongside criminals and subjected to their abuse. Most interesting is the account of the strangely permissive prison of Santo Stefano, off the coast of Naples.

The fourth chapter “Authority, Desire and Dissent: Serving the Revolution,” focuses on what Klopp calls partisans of unpopular ideas. The reader is introduced to two female prison writers: Anna Kuliscroff, whom Klopp calls the First Lady of Socialism and Enrichetta Caracciolo, the Neapolitan nun who struggled with surviving her own kind of confinement in a convent and who then went on to a career in journalism and feminist activism. For these writers sexual desire is mixed with political issues using the same passionate rhetorical terms for contemporary public issues. According to Klopp, prison stifled their freedom as sexual beings as proponents of a collective struggle.

The fifth chapter, “Answering Gramsci: The Anti-Fascists,” examines at length key communist activists who protested the oppressive Fascist government. Activists who, akin to their literary predecessors of the Risorgimento, were intellectuals rather than professional revolutionaries. Among the works of various anti-Fascist writers (Alicata, Rossi, Terracini, Levi, Bassani, Lo Sardo and Monti) the *Lette dal carcere* of Antonio Gramsci takes precedence. Klopp’s attention is drawn to the evident intervention of the censors in the correspondence of these prisoners. Gramsci’s letters were not only read by the prison censor but also by Mussolini himself.

The final chapter “The Death of a President/ The Effacement of an Author,” evinces the utmost extreme case of censor intervention. Klopp presents the case of Aldo Moro, kidnaped in 1978 by a group of terrorists from the Red Brigades. Not only was the hostage sealed in a noise-proof cell, but all his letters were read and edited by his captors before releasing them to the national newspapers, thus making his situation a very public affair. Having lost contact with the outside world both physically and linguistically, Moro was left with a one-sided discourse whose cries for help fell on deaf ears.

Taking into consideration the final two chapters, the reader is forewarned that the letters of such political prisoners as Moro and Gramsci were heavily scrutinized by censors who sought to erase the very cause these authors fought for. Nor can the memoirs be considered accurate sources, since many authors were subject to occasional lapses of memory. Still, these autobiographical texts offer important insights into the social conditions of prison life and the historical background of the period in confinement.

One final point made by Klopp touches on the importance of writing and on the exchange of information for political prisoners while in jail. Very few prisons were permitted reading and writing materials, especially during the Fascist era, so many prisoners wrote messages in code scratched on wood or on other surfaces and often used a form of ‘inchiostro simpatico’: invisible ink made out of acidic liquids like lemon juice, starch from meals or urine (used by Cellini). Other options for writing materials included toilet paper, pages from smuggled books, blood and pus.

In short, Klopp provides a fascinating collage of letters and memoirs of Italian political prisoners covering a broad amount of historical periods and social issues that span some five centuries. While generous consideration is given to the famous and influential individuals such as Pellico and Gramsci, Klopp goes to great pains to evince other significant and otherwise unknown writers. This book, complete with an expansive bibliography, is an important contribution to both the social and the literary history of Italy.

ROSLIA MORETTI

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*ItaliAfrica: Bridging Continents and Cultures*, ed. Sante Matteo. Stony Brook, NY: Forum Italicum Publishing, 2001. Pp. xii, 410. ISBN 1-8931-2722-2, US\$ 20.

In the 1970s, when the world discovered that Italy had become a rich country, a sustained flow of immigrants and “boat people” from Africa, Asia, and Eastern

Europe crowded the shores and airports of Italy in search of work and a better life. In the last two decades of the twentieth century this flow of people brought to Italy more than one million Africans. The problems of these Africans were discussed in an interdisciplinary and international Symposium on Africa and Italy held at the University of Miami, 6-8 November 1998.

*ItaliaAfrica...*, a multi-voices and multidisciplinary dialogue, illuminates the complex historical and cultural dichotomy, love-hate or attraction-repulsion, underlying the relations between Africa and Italy from the time of ancient Rome to the present. Symptomatic of this love-hate relation are, in ancient times, the Cleopatra-Mark Anthony love and the consequent Roman military stand against it; and, more recently, the reaction against the election of Ms Fernandez, a black woman, as Miss Italia 1996.

Though Africa and Italy are geographically close and geologically similar, the reader of this absorbing book will learn that the knowledge contemporary Italians have of Africa and Africans is based on the stratification of cultural époques and fanciful legends spanning from the Roman period, through the Middle Ages, to modern imperialism. In this Euro-Christian-centric view, Africa presents sharply contrasting features. In the pre-Christian era, Mediterranean Africa had been seen as a land of great civilizations such as those of Egypt and Carthage; in the Middle Ages Africa's hinterland was seen as an enchanting land inhabited, however, by troglodytes, cannibals, and home to slavery and nomadic tribes. In modern times, positivistic anthropologists such as Lombroso theorized Africans as a subhuman race, thus ideologically justifying the slave trade and opening the way to the imperialistic expansion of industrialized countries.

Though arriving late to the imperialistic banquet, Italy wanted her "*posto al sole*" too. In 1896 her first attempt to conquer the Ethiopian Empire on the Horn of Africa turned into a military disaster and, according to nationalists, a nightmarish stain on the nation's prestige. Italian imperialists acquired, however, their *posto al sole* by invading Libya in 1911-12 and expanded it with Mussolini's anachronistic conquest of Ethiopia in 1935-36. The fascist colonial experience "left behind no credible legacy and/or prestige" (p. 158). After the Second World War, because of her massive knowledge of the Horn of Africa, Italy was supposed to play a significant role in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Kenya and Nigeria, but her policy of expedience, lacking clear and long term objectives, was "a diplomatic disaster": she "has been bypassed and eventually sidelined by the much more effective initiatives taken by France and later by the United States," says Giampaolo Calchi Novadi of the University of Pavia (pp. 171-172).

Having traced the historical, cultural, military and political presence of Italy in and on Africa in the first three chapters of the book, the following four chapters trace the footprints of Africans in the Italian peninsula. Accustomed to hosting only tourists, Italy was neither politically nor psychologically prepared to receive large numbers of hetero-cultural and hetero-racial people in search of security, work, peace, and a better life for themselves and for their families. Italian policy makers have unfortunately carried out a questionable policy by granting the right to vote to Italians long established in other lands and to their offspring born

abroad, but have ignored the millions of immigrants who have lived, worked, and paid taxes into Italy's treasury for decades. Only after ten years of uninterrupted residence, these immigrants acquire the right to naturalization. Furthermore, most of these immigrants are not covered by social legislation: only 21% of "foreign" workers are protected by INPS (Istituto Nazionale per la Previdenza Sociale).

The humiliation, discrimination, racial abuse, mistreatment, and violence that black immigrants have endured and continue to endure in Italy at the hands of neo-racists find expression in the artistic works of these immigrants. Italian black and white artists have authored or co-authored, novels, poetry, plays, feature films, and documentaries. The aim of this artistic activity is to break out of the cultural and linguistic parameters by which the Euro-centric colonial and post-colonial ideologies have marginalized African culture, life, and civilization first in Africa and now in the Peninsula.

A most interesting experiment to overcome cultural marginality is the vanguard, cooperative Teatro delle Albe in Ravenna in which local and Senegalese playwrights and actors collaborate on an equal basis, using on stage Italian, its dialects, and Wolof (the Senegalese language). Known also as "zebrato artistico" and "teatro politttttico" (the word is written with seven "ts" to stimulate multi-interpretations), Teatro delle Albe has produced several co-authored plays that have been acclaimed at home and abroad. They have staged Goldoni's *Arlecchino*. With very little alterations to the original text, director Martinelli says, a *bergamasco del 700* became an African of the closing of the Millennium in Italy. The actor playing Harlequin was the Senegalese Mor Awa Moang.

Even the poems written by black poets aim at overcoming the marginal role allotted to Africans and their culture in Italy. Similar to Italian Canadians, black artists in Italy want to break through their isolation, assert their individuality as artists and as members of an economically active community. It can also be argued that African literature in Italy is becoming a new off shoot of the literature of political protest and utopian vision in the best political and/or *meridionalista* tradition.

*ItaliAfrica: Bridging Continents and Cultures* is an absorbing and fascinating discourse of many voices, conducted on different levels. It is an exploration of more than two millennia of Italian history and cultural involvement in the life of Africa, as well as a bird's eye view of the many legends describing the multidimensional, real and imaginary, world of Africa. This volume seems structured as a crash course on Africa and Italy. It raises many questions and stimulates interest in further readings. What clearly emerges, however, is the commitment of black and white Italians to overcome the socio-economic marginal status of Africans in Italy by challenging the nineteenth-century Euro-centric ideology that still lingers on in the Italy of the twenty-first century.

ANGELO PRINCIPE

(*Toronto*)

*Pluralism and Literary Practice. Essays in Honor of Albert N. Mancini*, eds. Paolo Giordano, and Anthony Julian Tamburri. West Lafayette: Bordighera Press, 1999. Pp. 330.

This book, dedicated to long-time Ohio State University professor of Italian, Albert Mancini, contains an array of 29 highly readable essays. The topics range from attitudes toward tobacco in late Renaissance Naples (Marco Santoro, "Sulle meravigliose virtù del tabacco") to the use of cartoons in the Italian L2 classroom (Vincenzo Gatto, "Sull'uso dei fumetti nella didattica dell'Italiano come L2"), from the lawyer in Italian Renaissance dram CDVGBa (Robert C. Melzi, "Law and Lawyers in Some Italian Renaissance Plays") to studies on Alfieri (Augustus Mastri, "Life as Paradigm? Freedom, Liberty, and the Masses in Alfieri's *Vita*"), Fenoglio (Paolo Giordano, "Beppe Fenoglio's Theatrical and Cinematic Writings: An Overview"), and Vittorini (Daniela Cavallaro, "Alessio, Aladino, Pinocchio: Elementi fiabeschi in *Il garofano rosso* di Elio Vittorini").

Two papers deal with Dante: Santa Casciani, "Consider the Rose, Where it Grows. Jean de Meun and Dante;" Dino Cervigni, "Pluto's Words versus Virgil's words: The Dantean Hell's Failure of Self-Referentiality." Casciani compares the *Divina Commedia* to the *Roman de la Rose*. She sees the *Commedia* as both "complementary to the *Roman*, in that it recalls and amplifies many images from the French text in a linear manner," and as antagonistic toward it insofar as it is, to recall Gianfranco Contini, "an anti-parodia of the French text" (2). She demonstrates that the plucking of the rose at the end of the *Roman* is described as a process based solely on the sense of touch. This erotic language is absorbed by Dante into his description of the rose and the process of beatification (cantos 30-31 of *Paradiso*). If, for example, blood imagery is used in the French text to describe the deflowering process alone, for Dante it acquires the visual, polysemous characteristics of the *Commedia* itself: it comes to suggest death and the crucifixion, and, hence, redemption and spiritual ecstasy (10).

Dino Cervigni, meanwhile, suggests that Pluto's nonsense answer to Virgil — "Pape Satàn, pape Satàn aleppe!" (*Inf. 7:1*) — is a verbal sign without referent insofar as Lucifer, ruler of Hell, is physically incapable of speech. Virgil's response to Pluto, by contrast, is linked to a "referential system enpowered to assert itself" (35). The silence that follows their exchange suggests that Pluto's speech is only a *signum sensuale*, i.e. audible sounds with no meaning, and not a *signum rationale*. Virgil's words, however, are both referential and deferential insofar as they are a call to Beatrice for assistance in the continuation of the journey.

Roland A. Champagne's essay, "Calling into question Psychoanalysis with an Ethics of Reading: Another Look at Italo Svevo's *La coscienza di Zeno*," relies on Emmanuel Levinas to suggest that *La coscienza di Zeno* exemplifies the "inherent failure of psychoanalysis to totalize the self" (41). Applying Levinas's notion of reading as an ethical act, the author suggests that humour is used to question the integrity of the self. He argues that in *La coscienza* "there can be no progress toward the analysis of the self's identity because the self reveals itself to be heterogeneous by its nature" (42).

In “Scholia on Angelological Cognition,” Paul Colilli discusses that realm in which the real is conjugated with the unreal. This involves a “strategy whereby the mind’s eye sees both what is physically there, but also that which is not perceived by the eye” (68), a process inscribed in forms of artistic expression that thrived before “Cartesian rationalism, that is before it became the exclusive domain of thought” (68). This transformation from real to unreal is the space of the angelological, and Colilli discusses Massimo Cacciari’s views on this topic. For Cacciari, the angelic sphere replaces the banality of the routine with the “wonder at what cannot be said or ever repeated: Humans have access to this land-of-no-where by means of the imagination” (71). Colilli also discusses the views of Valesio, Relli and Serres on the angelological.

David O. Frantz, in “Florio’s *Worlde of Wordes*: A Bridge Between Cultures,” discusses various criteria used by John Florio in producing his 1598 Italian-English dictionary. According to Frantz, Florio is conscious of his Italian heritage despite being a native Englishman, and he takes pride in his ability to negotiate between the two cultures. He thus has a penchant for comparing Italian and English practices: “*Babbo*, the first word children call their fathers by, as we say *dad*” (121); “*Gondola*, a kind of small bootes like our wherries used in *Venice*” (122). For Frantz, Florio’s desire to bring one culture into the understanding of the other “earns our admiration” (123).

In “‘Inevitabili force de amore,’ ‘cruel fortuna’ o *locura*: il suicidio d’amore nella letteratura pre-cinquentesca,” Luigi Monga provides a brief history of Western attitudes toward suicide as preparation for a future critical edition of a late-Quattrocento text on the topic, *Refugio de mixeri*. For the ancients, suicide becomes “un’azione degna di lode, un mezzo onorevole ed eticamente accettabile per porre fine a situazioni insostenibili o a tragedie insopportabili ... o risolvere onorevolmente un dilemma tra il bene individuale e quello della collettività” (228-9). And if suicide is condemned during the middle ages, there are still plenty of examples of it in literature. The general tendency in Christian culture, however, was to see “il suicidio d’amore,” such as in the story of Piramus and Thisbe, in culturally new terms, i.e. in anagogical Christian terms, as an act of justice, or as a form of expiation and self-punishment.

In “Music in Word and Image in the Seicento: Marco Boschini’s *La Carta del navegar pitoresco* and the Venetian Melodrama,” Glenn Galen Pierce studies Boschini’s work celebrating Venetian painting. Pierce demonstrates that there existed a symbiotic and reciprocally influential relationship between, on the one hand, Mannerism and Baroque painting of the Venetian Cinque-Seicento and, on the other, the melodrama of the same period. Boschini’s text, in which “painting is perceived to be a form of wondrously choreographed, sounding imagery,” suggests that the Venetians held “that opera was itself a form of painting set to music” (265).

Along with a bibliographical profile of the work of Albert Mancini (323-8), other essays in this diverse and highly useful collection include: Michele Cautadella, “Discorso sul barocco in letteratura;” Andrea Ciccarrelli, “Nota sulla polemica Classico- Romantica;” Carmine Di Biase, “Castiglione and Boccaccio in

Elizabethan Short Fiction;" Anna Maria Di Martino, "L'epistolario di Costanza Monti;" Luciano F. Farina, "Archivio storico Cusani: per una documentazione della topografia stradale di Carate a fine Settecento;" Mark Friguglietti, "Carlo Levi: the Ethnographic Nature of *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*;" Louis Kibler, "Carlo Betocchi and Paul Verlaine: Poetic Affinities;" Renée Kingcaid, "Dangerous Reflections: Mimesis and Narcissism in Serge Doubrovsky's *Le Livre brisé*;" Charles Klopp, "Giuseppe Pignata, Seventeenth-Century Virtual Author;" Michael Lettieri, "Per l'edizione del *Capriccio*: una commedia anonima del Cinquecento;" Nicholas J. Perella, "versions of Nine Poems;" Alan R. Perry, "'L'abito non fa il monaco': Disguise, Confession and Anticlericalism in Boccaccio's Tedaldo Tale (*Decameron* 3, 7);" Laura A. Salsini, "The Ideology of Motherhood in the Works of Early Twentieth-Century Italian Women Authors;" Donald C. Spinelli, "Beaumarchais, Krumpholtz, and the Harp: An Unidentified Letter;" Anthony Julian Tamburri, "Massimo Griffò's *Futuro anteriore*: A Case for the [Future] Perfect [of the] Novel."

MARIO D'ALESSANDRO

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*Women, Gender, and Transnational Lives. Italian Workers of the World*, eds. Donna R. Gabaccia, Franca Iacovetta. Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2002. Pp. xvi, 433. ISBN 0-8020-3611-2.

This volume in the Studies in Gender and History series includes twelve essays on Italian women workers of the world, both in the original English and in English translation by Gabriele Scardellato. The transnational approach follows a scholarly tradition "of studying Italy's migrations from global perspectives" (p. 6). This allows for the examination of the migration phenomenon from both the homeland and the receiving countries. As Gabaccia and Iacovetta state in the Preface this is a "woman-centered but gendered analysis of the twenty-seven million migrants who left Italy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (p. ix) Challenging conventional portraits of Italian women, and intent in rewriting world history 'from the bottom up,' these scholars, as social feminists more or less aligned with a material feminist perspective, focus on the relation between work and female agency; their studies include both the women who waited, while men went abroad, and the minority of females emigrants. As migration literature focuses predominantly on male migrants, this collection takes up an important task, the one of writing a gendered feminist history of women's lives and labour within the social networks created by massive male migration from Italy. The concept of work examined in these essays has been wisely broadened, in order to include unpaid and waged work, the experiences of peasants in Italy, and those of workers and activists in labour, political and radical movements.

Part I "When Men Go Away: Women Who Wait and Work" focuses on the lives of women in post-unification Italy and exposes its regional complexity. Linda Reeder's case study of a small town in western Sicily reveals the difficult conditions

of Sicilian women during the mass migration period of 1880-1920. Despite their inability to work in agriculture, due to cultural taboos, Sicilian wives of migrants participated in the migration process; from the homeland they contributed to family respectability and economic stability. Andreina De Clementi explores the migrations strategies in rural Italian South from the perspective of land, inheritance and marriage market, and shows how temporary male migration and new inheritance rules allowed women to be in charge of land and patrimony. Maddalena Tirabassi challenges traditional views on domestic work and morality as they appear in contemporary scholarly male discourse on peasant women, whose husbands were migrants. Tirabassi's essay reveals that, despite the construction of immigration as a distinctively Southern phenomenon, symbolic of collapsing economy and morality, overwhelming evidence exists that also the 'progressive' north and central regions were affected by massive emigration.

Part II "Female Immigrants at Work" centers around women who worked abroad. Paola Corti traces late nineteenth-century female migration from Northern Italy to France and pinpoints instances of female autonomy in skilled female vocation and trades across the border. Diane Vecchio examines gender and domestic values in Italian midwives and businesswomen in Milwaukee and shows that Italian immigrant women were challenging tradition as much as militant women.

Perhaps the most stimulating findings come from Part III "Fighting Back: Militants, Radicals, Exiles." In line with the book's project to challenge the traditional image of Italian women as silent, submissive and passive, this section, which includes the largest number of essays, presents the strongest evidence of Italian immigrant women's agency and activism. José Moya examines women's participation in Buenos Aires's Anarchist Movement between 1890 and 1910; his essay shows that in Argentina, Italian women played a leading role in creating national labour movements through proletarian mobilization. Caroline Waldron Merithew's study deals with motherhood and revolutionary proletariat in Illinois Coal Towns. Merithew explores a form of immigrant female anarchism distinctive from Emma Goldman's anarcho-feminism. Most Italian anarchist women articulated a form of maternalist radicalism as it appears in Illinois's multi-ethnic coal communities. Jennifer Guglielmo studies Italian women's proletarian feminism in the New York City's garment trade, between the 1890s and the 1940s. Italian-American female activism was closely connected to ethnic loyalties and family networks, where mothers passed their radical heritage to their daughters etc. By rejecting the static portrait of Italian immigrant women as reluctant activist, this essay challenges most directly traditional U.S. historiography.

Robert Ventresca and Franca Iacovetta focus on Virgilia D'Andrea: anarchist, activist journalist and poet who, fleeing Italian fascism in the 1920s, traveled to Europe, Canada and settled in the United States in 1928. As partner of journalist anarchist Armando Borghi, D'Andrea only partially mirrors American anarchist-feminist Emma Goldman. While often described merely as a collaborator in Borghi's revolutionary activism, Ventresca and Iacovetta highlight D'Andrea's role in the American anarchist movement and invoke a more prominent role for the woman, often reduced in Borghi's memoir and in male comrades's commentary to bourgeois ideals of wom-

anhood. D'Andrea was a more prolific writer than Borghi, more active in delivering speeches and gained broader fame among Italian radicals in the Americas. Her poetry shows clues of her life as exile and of her politics; most evocative is the poem "Mentre il boia attende," dedicated to Italian immigrants Sacco and Vanzetti, unjustly sentenced to death in Massachusetts in the 1930s. For D'Andrea the two innocent men embodied the story of all immigrants betrayed by native Fascist Italy.

Anne Morelli explores female migrant militancy from a European perspective focusing on the case-study of a Calabrian woman emigrated to Belgium to join a fellow villager working in a Belgium's mining community after the Second World War. This paradoxical female figure was both forbidden to work by her husband and yet forced into communist activism.

Part IV "As We See Ourselves, As Others See Us" contains two essays which promote differing perspectives in the ways outsiders have constructed Italian women's identities as workers and familists but never as militants. Angelo Principe studies female activism in Canada during the Fascist era, and Roslyn Pesman documents the experience and representation of Italian women in Australia from the 1950s to the 1970s, the short period of most massive Italian migration to Australia.

Principe's study is particularly relevant for the Canadian audience of this journal, since it sheds light on the complexity of immigrant women's life in Canada during the first half of the twentieth century. Principe shows that, despite the limited numbers of militant women, they were sympathizers of both Fascism and anti-Fascism. Fascism played a wider role in female identity-formation in Canada and provided a more structured arena for activism. Italian immigrant women promoting the Fascist ethos of domesticity, family values and social inferiority, were caught in ideological confusion: "they experienced the conundrum of being female activists in a movement that regarded women merely as reproducers of the race." (375)

This collection fully achieves its stated goals of upturning the male centered, gender-neutral position of most previous historical research on the subject and therefore deserves high consideration and praise. The engaging and well documented studies in this collection are a valuable tool for both historians focusing on gender issues and scholars of Italian emigration. At times, however, one gets the impression that the program of carving a less passive role for Italian immigrant women workers is pursued a bit too zealously. Roslyn Pesman concedes that methodology and ideology have their risks. She warns that representations of women may change according to prevailing ideologies: Italian women in Australia, she argues, have moved from being invisible to becoming victims, then protagonists, from passive to autonomous individuals. I believe Pesman's final words can serve as an apt commentary to the whole collection: "While it may be better to be a protagonist rather than a victim, the recent images need to be regarded as critically and sceptically as their predecessors.[...] We go on constructing the past as well as the present and we need to be as sceptical about the knowledge that we create in our time and place as we are about that of the past." (402)

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Fenu Barbera, Rossana. *La donna che cammina. Incanto e mito della seduzione del passo femminile nella poesia italiana del primo Novecento*. Ravenna: Longo, 2001. Pp. 153. ISBN 8-8806-3279-5.

This book examines the poetic image of the walking woman in Italian poetry of the early twentieth century. Women in motion have provided inspiration for mythology, philosophy, and art in general. We need only think of Botticelli's *Primavera* or Dalí's *Gradiva*, as well as Baudelaire's sonnet "A une passante," the most famous literary example of the walking woman. A study of the symbolic meaning of the motif occupies the book's first two chapters, which touch upon religion, philosophy, literature, figurative arts and provide an apt introduction to the second two chapters, that move to specific textual analysis of Italian poetry by Gabriele D'Annunzio, Vincenzo Cardarelli, Camillo Sbarbaro, Dino Campana, Corrado Govoni, Cesare Pavese, Eugenio Montale, Giorgio Caproni, Mario Luzi and Attilio Bertolucci. Fenu Barbera's contention is that, despite the broad and varied presence of the image of the walking woman throughout the cultural spectrum over the centuries, it is at the rise of the Novecento that the *topos* assumes complex metaphorical meanings, crucial for the male poet/viewer of the woman. The walking woman exhibits the sense of novelty, freedom and emancipation, that mark Novecento's modernity. With her motion and energy she can stir emotion and pleasure in the poet/viewer, and she can serve as a vehicle for epistemological investigation. The passerby finds her ancestral roots in the Jungian archetype of the 'anima,' symbol of life, vital breath and mystery. Moreover the walking woman can express the creative energy of the poet and his journey through poetic creativity.

Chapter 1 ("L'immagine della donna cammina nella cultura europea") opens with an overview of the image in turn of the century European culture. The woman caught in the act of walking has strong effects on the observers, be her a passerby in the crowded city street, or the fashion model walking down the catwalk. Fenu Barbera investigates the symbolic significance of a *topos* whose origin dates back to primitive cults, mythology (Ovidian myths) philosophy (Plato and Aristotle) and religion (Song of Songs), to reappear in Medieval Italian lyric poets such as Dante, Cavalcanti ("Chi è questa che vèn, ch'ogn'om la mira") and Petrarcha. At the dawn of the twentieth century, the image of the woman in motion finds a fascinating incarnation in Wilhelm Jensen's short novel *Gradiva* (1903). Perhaps better known through Freud's essay "Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's *Gradiva*" (1907), this novel is interpreted as a modern visitation of the myth of Pygmalion. In fact Fenu Barbera sees the image of the walking woman as the locus where two myths conflate: the myth of Pygmalion and the one of Apollo and Daphne.

In chapter 2 ("Dal mito dell'anima al mito dell'anima gemella") Fenu Barbera establishes the link between the walking woman and the concept of 'anima' which is investigated from a mythological, philosophical (as developed by Aristotle and Plato) and psychoanalytical perspective. In the collective unconscious of philosophers and poets 'anima' takes up human form, female gender and is associated to

the idea of movement, and vital breath, all founding elements that appear in the image of walking woman.

Chapter 3 ("La donna che cammina nella poesia italiana del Novecento") moves directly to Italian early twentieth century poetry for a close analysis. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's concept that from movement originates our desire, and that motion is an essential communicative element in perceptive relations between individuals, Fenu Barbera then locates in movement and sight the pleasure of the poet/viewer, his sense of anticipation and mystery at the sight of the elusive passerby, who excites his imagination with her indefinite and transient presence. So Campana "Andava. La vita s'apriva/ Agli occhi profondi e sereni?/Andava lasciando un mistero/ di sogni avverati..." Sometimes mystery and anticipation lead to anticlimax as in Bertolucci's "Chi è quella che viene verso di noi affannata." Here the poet recasts Cavalcanti's famous opening line in a demystified variation of the *topos*, where instead of an idealized female figure the woman is the family servant. A semiotic analysis of literary representations of body in motion reveals that, through the image of the walking woman, the male poet can acquire identity, sense of self, can enjoy visual pleasure, achieve complementarity and union with the woman, who can be for the poet both 'anima' and 'anima gemella.'

Perhaps the most interesting part of this book is chapter 4 ("Il testo poetico come spazio e percorso della camminata"), where Fenu Barbera, supported by theoretical study on poetic creative process as explained by Barthes, De Certeau, Lorca, Maria Corti and others, finds in all the poetic instances of female perambulation a unifying element: the walking woman is a metaphor for the 'anima' of the poet and his voyage through the thematic, stylistic, metric, rhythmical adventures of poetic creation. As stated in Maria Corti's *Il viaggio testuale*, poetry itself can be seen as a journey, measured in feet, pace and rhythm. Fenu Barbera thinks that the literary motif of the walking woman can be "una sorta di drammatizzazione figurata dello svolgersi del linguaggio poetico." (115) Poetry is the path that one walks slowly or fast, it can skillfully reproduce the movement of the walking woman. Campana in "Tre giovani fiorentine" follows the rhythm of music and uses synesthesia to convey poetically and metrically feminine movement; Govoni in "Contro corrente come bionde trote" sees the stroll of two young women along the street as the flow of fish down the stream and reproduces it in the poetic rhythm.

For Fenu Barbera the walking woman of early twentieth century poetry can look back, assert her presence in the world and exorcize death with her vitality, as Annina does in Caproni's poems. The passerby seems to display a "profonda maturing e coscienza proprio grazie a questa libertà di guardare sia avanti che indietro: una libertà che permette ... il distacco da certi legami culturali col passato" (98). However the very absence of the female voice in these texts seems to reinforce a more traditional cultural perspective than Fenu Barbera sees; in fact the only form of expression offered to the silent walking woman is the display of her body and her movement. The woman in motion as a metaphor for male poetic creation and vehicle for the construction of male subjectivity still denies her own voice. As

Fenu Barbera mentions in the Conclusion, a look at how and whether women writers have employed the image of the walking woman, could yield very different conclusions.

By favouring a philosophical, psychological and semiotic reading over more traditional socio-historical and literary approach, this book offers an innovative and meaningful perspective into twentieth century Italian poetry. By placing early Novecento poetry in a wide context including visual arts (the book includes plates reproducing important samples of walking women in painting, sculpture and photography) and European literature this book can be of interest to both the specialized scholar and the common reader.

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Dombroski, Robert S. *Creative Entanglements: Gadda and the Baroque*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999. Pp. x, 151. ISBN 0-8020-4490-5 \$40.

Spentosi il 10 maggio del 2002, Dombroski è stato, per lungo tempo, una delle autorità letterarie e critiche dell'italianistica nordamericana. I suoi lavori su Boccaccio, Pirandello, Manzoni e, soprattutto, su Gadda, rimangono ancor'oggi un punto di riferimento importante per tutti gli studiosi di letteratura italiana, analisi puntuali ed approfondite in cui l'autore ha saputo combinare studio letterario ed influenze interdisciplinari. Il volume in questione (il terzo dedicato al grande scrittore lombardo dopo *Introduzione allo studio di Carlo E. Gadda* del 1974 e *Carlo Emilio Gadda: Contemporary Perspectives* del 1997) conferma questa tendenza. Al fine di penetrare i significati più profondi dell'arte narrativa di Gadda, Dombroski usa con perizia vari approcci critici (la psicologia freudiana, la filosofia di Leibniz, oltre che teorici quali Benjamin e Deleuze). Il risultato è di notevole spessore. L'autore si dimostra assolutamente a suo agio nell'inserire ogni possibile spunto metodologico all'interno del proprio discorso critico che, lungi dal risultare appesantito da un tale apparato epistemologico, se ne giova, dando vita ad un testo intenso e illuminante che di certo appassionerà i tanti lettori dello scrittore milanese.

Scopo dello studio di Dombroski è quello, evidente e scoperto sin dalle primissime pagine, di inserire l'arte gaddiana all'interno di una prospettiva più ampia, e cioè quella prospettiva *neobarocca* che, tanto in voga in questi giorni, acquista in Gadda —come in pochi altri scrittori— una valenza ed una rilevanza assolute. Il barocco, inteso non solo come categoria estetica ma anche come visione del mondo, probabilmente rappresentò per Gadda l'unico strumento in grado di “dire” una realtà non più lineare e meccanicistica ma, al contrario, “creative, unpredictable, and mysterious” (p. ix): in altri termini, spiega Dombroski, “Gadda is baroque [...], because the world itself is baroque” (p. 4). Ma le implicazioni del barocco, o *neobarocco* se si preferisce, non finiscono certo qui: infatti, attraverso una scrittura fatta di infinite digressioni, variazioni, relazioni, lo scrittore

lombardo intese anche allontanarsi da un'estetica neorealista lontana anni luce dalla propria *forma mentis* e troppo vicina ad una cultura popolare borghese che Gadda avvertì sempre come estranea. Egli, infatti, vero “soggetto barocco” (Dombroski parla di “baroque self”; p. 6), frammentò il proprio essere autoriale in numerosi perso-naggi (Don Ciccio Ingravallo, Gonzalo Pirobutirro, Captain Gaddüs, e così via), ognuno dei quali restituì alla pagina scritta solo alcuni degli aspetti di questo straordinario artista la cui personalità, anch'essa costituita da infiniti “grovigli” e nodi, male sopportava l'essere costretta da un solo punto di vista. L'interrelazione che esiste tra le cose, è anche l'interrelazione che lega il soggetto al mondo —e l'autore alla propria scrittura—, con tutti i traumi che ciò può comportare.

Se nel primo capitolo Dombroski spiega in che senso debba essere interpretato il rapporto Gadda/Barocco, negli altri quattro l'autore entra nel merito di alcune delle opere più celebri di Gadda: il secondo (“Baroque Solitude: Disillusion and the Ruins of War”), ad esempio, è dedicato a quegli scritti composti durante (*Giornale di guerra e di prigionia*) e dopo (*Il castello di Udine*) la prima guerra mondiale, evento cui Gadda partecipò in prima persona. Ovviamente, ciò che interessa più Dombroski non è tanto la scrittura di guerra intesa in senso diaristico, quanto piuttosto la rappresentazione che Gadda fa della guerra e della sua insensatezza e che diventa, sulle sue pagine, “a theatre of dramatic movement between the subject and its world: a baroque spectacle” (p. 25). La scrittura da descrittiva si fa espressiva (e l'Espressionismo è un'altra delle categorie usate da Dombroski per analizzare il mondo gaddiano), e si distingue per quello che Dombroski —con felice intuizione— definisce “excess of meaning” (p. 27): ecco, è proprio qui, in questo “eccesso” discorsivo che risiede il nucleo dell'arte di Gadda, barocca fino al punto da diventare grottesca. Il grottesco e la satira, oggetto di discussione del terzo capitolo (“Creative Bodies: Theory and Practice of the Grotesque”), trovano in Gadda e nell'uso che egli fa del corpo umano un luogo privilegiato ove poter affermare il proprio spirito dissacratorio: il corpo diventa personaggio, occupa per intero la scena narrativa e la scrittura genera deformazione espressionista.

Il quarto capitolo (“A Baroque Ethics”), interamente dedicato alla discussione de *La cognizione del dolore*, si concentra sul complicato rapporto esistente tra il soggetto (in questo caso Gonzalo) e il mondo, un rapporto che in Gadda e nei suoi alter-ego letterari non è mai sereno ma, al contrario, sempre conflittuale. In un'analisi che combina abilmente psicologia freudiana e critica letteraria, Dombroski, una volta ancora, dimostra come la instabilità psicologica dei personaggi gaddiani dia vita ad una narrazione che invece di pacificare e armonizzare, complica ulteriormente le cose. In pratica, il vuoto esistenziale percepito da Gonzalo si riempie di parole e di segni la cui funzione non è solo formale ma anche, afferma Dombroski, etica: “the baroque excess [...] is not only a formal solution to nihilism, but an ethical one as well” (p. 84). La scrittura si carica così di un significato ulteriore, ben più profondo, ponendosi come appiglio e punto di riferimento di fronte al collasso razionale del mondo.

A conclusione di questo itinerario all'interno del mondo artistico e letterario di Gadda, non poteva ovviamente mancare un capitolo incentrato su quella che

rimane probabilmente l'opera più celebre dello scrittore lombardo, vale a dire *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* ("A Baroque Mistery"). In questo romanzo, l'abilità di Gadda di vedere e prefigurare l'infinita relazione esistenze tra le cose trova la sua massima espressione: il risultato è una *detective-story* che, paradossalmente, invece di condurre il lettore ad una risoluzione finale del mistero, si attorciglia su sé stessa, creando un effetto di "perpetual displacement" (p. 97). Il nodo, lungi dallo sciogliersi nelle pagine finali, cresce *ad infinitum*, dopo ogni singola pagina. In questo processo risiede la grandissima novità del romanzo di Gadda, puntualmente sottolineata da Dombroski che scrive: "Gadda's originality consists less in representing the tangles scheme of things which in traditional detective fiction begs to be, and is usually, unravelled, than in expanding entanglement in such a way that solution and closure are virtually impossible" (p. 98).

Il volume si chiude con un "Appendice" di grande interesse. Dedicata ai rapporti tra Gadda e il Fascismo, questa sezione intende riconsiderare quello che, per molti anni, è stato interpretato come un rapporto occasionale e legato solo a situazioni contingenti. Al contrario, Dombroski riesce a dimostrare, in virtù di un'accuratissima ricerca testuale, come questo rapporto sia stato più forte e importante di quanto non sia stato sostenuto. Tuttavia, a dispetto di questa adesione, Gadda non esitò mai, come nel caso del *Pasticciaccio* o di *Eros e Priapo*, a sbaffeggiare la retorica fascista, bersaglio ideale su cui poter liberare tutta la propria carica satirica. Termina così il libro, uno studio veramente interessante e appassionato al termine del quale ci si sente stimolati a tuffarsi nella lettura delle pagine più significative di Gadda, autore dalle mille sfaccettature che Dombroski aiuta senza dubbio a comprendere meglio.

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Nanni, Luciano. *Communication: The Power of Location. Essays on Adespotic Aesthetics*, trans. Corrado Federici. New York, Peter Lang, 2000. Pp. 197. ISBN 0-820445-44-4.

"Aestheticians and scientist are distinguishable from ordinary people not because they have different problems, but because they try to provide more complex explanations or definitions for the problem" (p. 74). However complex the explanations in this book by Luciano Nanni, who has been teaching at the University of Bologna since he got his degree there in 1970, the problem that interests him is fairly simple. What allows artistic communication to refuse unequivocal meaning, inviting interpretation after interpretation? What is it that makes art polysemic? Is it something inscribed its formal structure, or a function of the contexts in which it is read? Nanni's book is a polemic against what he refers to in shorthand as the "structuralist," and emblematises with the semiotician Umberto Eco and occasionally Roman Jacobson, a theorist who explains polysemy by reference to the particular use of signs which are made by an artwork. Nanni's competing theory

(presented, to all appearances, as though it were mutually exclusive of the other) is that linguistic meanings are established by the cultural frameworks determining their use, frameworks that prompt us to see some semiotic acts as clear and others as fuzzy, some as unequivocal, others as polysemic.

The first interest of Nanni's essays is to establish and justify this polysemy of the artwork against a belief in autonomously determinable meanings of art. Nanni returns again and again to a notion that has not occupied American theorists for some twenty years: the intentional fallacy, or the relative irrelevance of an author's intentions. If anything, we have come full swing on this issue since the famous New Critical attacks in the 1940s and 1950s, at least since Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michael's essay "Against Theory" of 1982 convinced us that the search for authorial intentions is inevitably at work in readings. Nanni's objective, instead, is to stress the extent to which literary meaning is produced extrinsically: "metaphor does not exist as a problem in [a] work ... but in the critics who interpret the work. Criticism metaphorizes the reality of the work; the work does not metaphorize the reality external to it" (p. 123). And yet, once the responsibility for polysemy is located outside the text, however, one must wonder how far such polysemy obtains. Was *The Iliad* as ambiguous to Homer's listeners as it sometimes is to us? Is there something in that text which has led cultures to read it in differing ways? Nanni properly reaffirms the hermeneutical a prioris of discursive situation over textual formalism; but that in itself does not vanquish such formalism, or the effort to understand the composition of artistic languages. For this composition is itself cultural, promoting various degrees of polysemy. It is itself a function of practice and convention, of cultural "readings," no less than an interpreter's reading of it.

Nanni's second large objective is to redirect theoretical attention from a poetics of production to a poetics of use. Logically this would seem to point to the interests and institutions—cultural, historical, ethical, political, commercial—to which artistic practices are subjected. Yet it is not clear whether Nanni would welcome such investigations. Everything in this book points to the pragmatics of artistic consumption as the basis for art's heightened powers of meaning, but Nanni still appears unwilling to embroil himself in messy matters of artistic reception. Once or twice in this book he indicates that thinkers do exist who recognize an *intentio culturae* beneath the *intentio auctoris*, *operis*, and *lectoris* that concern the semiotician: to wit, Stanley Fish, Arthur Danto, and Gianni Vattimo, on one page (p. 108). But they are all dispatched. Fish "does not fully realize what he intuits or sees"; Danto "ends up opting for an Aristotelianism by which he confuses effect and cause"; Vattimo, who is admittedly interested in the *intentio culturae*, is of little use because he "has concerns that are more ethical-political than strictly scientific" (p. 108). Given Nanni's own principles, one wonders when scholastic, scientific theory should cede pride of place to thick cultural analysis?

Some readers sympathetic to Nanni's argument may regret that the only recent theorist he does not ignore is his colleague (and apparent nemesis) at Bologna, Umberto Eco. Scores of others have built bodies of work around Nanni's concerns, beginning with Ludwig Wittgenstein, who amply established that living situations of language-use underlie interpretations of meaning. Since Wittgenstein

many others have argued Nanni's main points in plain rhetoric, thinkers with whom he might have engaged in fruitful dialogue: Fish himself, with his classic transpositions of significance from words to interpretive communities; Richard Rorty, whose new pragmatism locates the construction of meaning in complex culture; Heidegger, Gadamer and reception aestheticians, inspired by a hermeneutical understanding of historicity; Stanley Cavell, John Searle, and speech act theorists; Paul De Man, with his emphasis on the rhetoric that sustains semiotics; American new literary historians, who have actually taken the messy next step after Nanni, excavating a variety of sociopolitical conventions contextualizing the production and reception of art.

This interesting book is Nanni's first in English. Ten of its eleven essays were first published in a journal Nanni directs at the University of Bologna called *Parol*. Most of them were read as papers at local Italian conferences between 1985 and 1991, and have retained that form of delivery. Virtually each one advances the same argument with equal power of persuasion, on the basis of the same principles of validation, the same moves, and the same discursive examples. In that respect, the book's title and two subtitles are perhaps too wide ranging.

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Parisi, Luciano. *Borgese*, Torino: Tirrenia Stampatori, 2000. Pp. 96. ISBN 8-8776-3484-7. Euro 7.75.

Giuseppe Antonio Borgese's human and academic weaknesses and strengths are certainly made abundantly clear, albeit in the most polite of ways, in this collection of five previously published studies by Luciano Parisi. The Sicilian writer's assertive nature and boundless confidence in his opinions are among the less attractive aspects of his character. Perhaps his large output of writings in academic and more general spheres engendered a confusion in him between omnipresence and omniscience. Parisi's studies are perceptive, scholarly, and informative, though he tends generally to side with revealed authority rather than to venture original analyses. The chapter headings are: "La critica militante", "Borgese e Manzoni", "I romanzi", "I libri di viaggio" and finally "Gli scritti politici".

Parisi emphasizes the distinction between the two fields in which Borgese's criticism was practised: the academic and the journalistic and argues for Borgese's critical status on the basis of the latter, his "critica militante" in the *Corriere della Sera* and other newspapers. He sees this criticism as marked by "un'estetica seria, articolata, coerente" and by "una capacità caratterizzante di insolita efficacia" (p. 23). Borgese's intuitive judgements in the Press led to conclusions regarding new writers which were accepted by successive generations. One could recall, for example, that he was one of the first to express enthusiasm for Moravia's *Gli indifferenti*. On the other hand, as Parisi underlines, Borgese's academic criticism failed to produce "ampie costruzioni intellettuali". It is not evident to me, nevertheless, that

one could attribute more than ephemeral significance to Borgese's *critica militante* and Parisi simply affirms its value rather than presenting a substantial argument for it.

The second chapter, "Borgese e Manzoni", argues for the importance of Borgese's studies of Manzoni and for the influence of Manzoni on Borgese's own spiritual development. Borgese was concerned as to whether Manzoni represented a break from classicism or a reform of it: an issue of categorization which does not really lead anywhere. As for the spiritual influence, it is not substantiated by any close consideration of the nature of Manzoni's beliefs. The pattern of development Parisi perceives in Borgese, who apparently passes from a non-Christian attitude (see, for example, his scorn of mediocre beings in the 1909 essay on D'Annunzio) to a rediscovery of Christian values (seen in the novel *Rubé*), hardly reveals so specific a type of Christianity as to indicate any close links with Manzoni.

The brief chapter on Borgese's novels includes extensive summaries and treats these works particularly as evidence of the author's personal struggle with concepts of religion and spirituality. There is no substantial distinction made between the novels' protagonists and the author. The treatment does not discuss the works' literary aspects as much as consider them a source of autobiographical evidence, again of a supposed evolution in Borgese's thought. A similar tendency dominates Parisi's comments on *Rubé*. In these days, when the content of real autobiography is interpreted with numerous caveats and certainly not considered as "truth", the procedure seems fraught with risk.

"I libri di viaggio" once more concentrates on biographical aspects in that Parisi argues that an evolution in thought is revealed in Borgese's travel writings. These had been inaugurated in 1909 in the *La nuova Germania*, excruciatingly provincial and racist, notwithstanding the fact that it was written subsequent to Borgese's two-year stay in the country. There is, Parisi indicates, a more benign tolerance to be seen in Borgese's post-1931 writings on the United States. For Parisi "la sua ammirazione per la realtà americana è attenta, calibrata" rather than opportunistic (p. 72). It is open to question whether this really indicates an evolution or maturation in Borgese's thought, rather than a reflection of the fact that life in the United States did not offer many challenges to the comfort and beliefs of a university professor in the 1930s. Consider that not long before, in his 1929 volume *Autunno di Costantinopoli*, he had written "le donne turche? Sono assorte in una 'beatitudine vuota'" (cited p. 68). Indeed, my tendency for all this material would be to suggest that Borgese wrote with his eyes ever fixed on the dominant value systems of his readers.

The final chapter, thirteen and a half pages on Borgese's "scritti politici", reveals at a distance of sixty or so years the full superficiality and pompousness of Borgese. Perhaps one can pat him on the back for his opposition to fascism but the never-abandoned belief in the individuals who influence world history, his belief that ideals, rather than economics were the most important factors in world history indicate that he had not progressed from D'Annunzio and was not unlike Mussolini. Fascism simply seems to have provided Borgese with yet another opportunity to promote himself, this time in an English which he did not have the

modesty to have improved. See for instance the grotesque expression in his *Common Cause*:

"the rules of the epic would have been better observed if Boston had risen for a Holy Sepulchre to liberate or for a Helen to recuperate, while the uninspiring strife over matters of taxation and levies, too frankly avowed, seemed made to order for the most remorseless materialistic interpretation of history." ((cited p. 86)

Parisi quotes Piovene's opinion that "l'esagerata considerazione che lo scrittore ha del proprio ruolo storico sia un dato medio, una qualità neutra capace di degenerare in vizio o degenerare in virtù." (p. 87). This is a little too kind.

Obviously there is a certain convenience for the student of Borgese to have assembled in one volume five well-informed studies on Borgese. Each one, having been published previously, has its own academic *imprimatur*. However the new setting generates distortions of emphasis and redundancies which there has been no attempt to address. Granted, for example, that the political writing of Borgese is truly horrible, is it reasonable to dedicate nearly as much to it in a volume as to his more meritorious novels? Let us by all means gather posthumously into single volumes substantial articles of the various great departed scholars. The living could make a few allowances for their readers, by adjusting and editing. In its citations Borgese employs an impenetrable combination of endnotes plus abbreviations in brackets. Each chapter repeats its own separate abbreviations, encrypted at some time and in some place, in one or several endnotes. Was it necessary to print on each of the pages 40, 58 and 75 that henceforth R would stand for *Rube*? To have an idea of the effort required to read the book, multiply this by the number of all similar bibliographical items similarly treated. Surely a single list of abbreviations, and indeed a single bibliography, would be the least one could have expected. In short this volume should have been assembled with more regard for the reader.

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Paolozzi, Ernesto. *Benedetto Croce. Logica del reale e il dovere della libertà*. Napoli: Libreria Editrice E. Cassitto, 1998. Pp. 91.

Ernesto Paolozzi's *Benedetto Croce* is the best short introduction to the philosophy of the Neapolitan philosopher to date. The work provides a general view of Croce's philosophy and presents an in-depth analysis of some of the key issues Croce tangled with throughout his career: the relation of the aesthetic to the logic; the role and viability of the sciences; the world of *praxis* understood in terms of economy, politics, ethics and vitality; the question of liberalism, and, finally, the notion of history as contemporary history. But the author's most valuable contribution lies in the fact that his reading is not simply a survey or a synthesis of Croce's work but

a critical analysis that undermines many of the standard and traditional readings. Albeit in the form of suggestions and working hypotheses, given the modest objectives of the work, Paolozzi lays the groundwork for future and innovative analyses of Croce's philosophy.

The author reads Croce within the historical background against which his philosophy emerged and developed. He outlines Croce's lifelong struggle against Positivism, against the danger of a mentality that would submit to the scientific method any field of knowledge from literary criticism to history, from philosophy to politics. He points to the early influence on Croce by Antonio Labriola and Marxism, to his relationship with Giovanni Gentile and the founding of the journal *La critica*, to the erudite studies on the history and legends of Naples, as well as to the early studies on history and aesthetics that foreshadow the later philosophical works. Finally, Paolozzi stresses the importance of Hegel's influence and above all, of Giambattista Vico, as well as the theme of liberty developed in the later years, of liberty as a moral principle and as a method of interpreting reality.

In dealing with the *Aesthetics* of 1902, Croce's first major work, Paolozzi discusses the central role that it occupies within the corpus of Croce's philosophy and the importance that he attributed to the aesthetic as "testing ground" for any philosophy and as key to understanding the cultural and ideological premises of his own thought. The most important of these premises are the identity of aesthetics and language, as the title of *Aesthetics as Science of Expression and General Linguistics* indicates, and the Kantian influence on Croce's argumentation that, in Paolozzi's view, has had an even greater influence than Hegel. Croce's *Aesthetics* is yet another instance of Croce's philosophy as a "concrete and operating philosophy of liberty." It frees artistic activity from the strictures and prejudices of tradition in order to fulfil the true task of philosophy which is that of explaining reality, of finding the reasons of what we already intuit and know.

Paolozzi also dismisses the established prejudice of a discrepancy between Croce the theorist and the literary critic. In his view there is "continuous osmosis" between theory and practice as theory sheds light on the criticism and vice versa. Though he is aware that Croce's critical judgment can sometimes reflect his own personal taste and can be excessive at times, as when he praises a very minor poet but damns a major one, in his view, Croce's judgment is always in line with his methodology and critical ideology, as when he combats aestheticism, sensualism and a certain type of romanticism, which go hand in hand with his struggle against rationalism and positivism. Even when Croce's judgment appears misguided and negative, it is often a question of giving Croce a second reading and realize that in some cases he was not very wrong. In other cases, though, one can say only that "Croce the critic forgets Croce the theorist."

In his analysis of Croce's, *The Logic*, Paolozzi insists on the basic Kantian origins of his universal-concrete concept. Croce's system, in his view, is nothing but a continuous chain of synthetic *a priori* concepts, in a general synthesis constitutive of both life and history. In contrast to Hegel's opposition and dialectics, Croce opposes a logic of distincts without, however, negating Hegel's dialectic. The concept of utility, for example, is not in opposition to the concept of good (art) or

truth (philosophy) but is distinct from them. Utility is only opposed to what is not useful, what is harmful, and so on. The concept of distinction does not imply, however, that there is no unity. The contrary is true for concepts are only distinguishable in their unity. Their reality and unity is also their distinction. "Man," says Croce, "is both thought and action."

Paolozzi also provides an account of Croce's other major theme, the relation between thought and action, between philosophical and historical judgment, or, as he puts it in *The Logic*, the identity of philosophy and history. Philosophy, Paolozzi explains, does not imply or incorporate history (in Croce, rather, the opposite is true) but thinks history and is continuously transformed by it, in its constant struggle with the negative.

Paolozzi's most important contribution is in clarifying Croce's attitude toward the sciences and their relation to Croce's historicist philosophy. In his view, the problem does not originate with Croce but with Kant and Hegel who had already taken position against the sciences and had already differentiated scientific from philosophical research. In Croce, instead, the issue is radically different because the sciences do not constitute an inferior form of knowledge, rather a "distinct" knowledge from philosophy. The sciences do not belong to the sphere of the intellect or spirit, but to the sphere of practical reason, and to the sphere of the economic. The sciences, thus, should not be judged in terms of whether they are true or false, but in terms of their utility.

In the remaining chapters, Paolozzi discusses the *Philosophy of the Practical* and the categories of vitality-utility; his concept of liberalism and the historical works that exemplify it, and, finally, *History. Theory and Practice*, the fourth and last of Croce's major works that make up his Philosophy of Spirit, where his concept of history as contemporary history and as ethico-political historiography is discussed, together with his major historical works: the *History of the Kingdom of Naples*, *History of the Baroque in Italy*, *The History of Italy from 1871 to 1915*, and the most famous one, *History of Europe in the XIXth Century*. These last chapters provide a final taste of Croce's more compelling and, to be sure, problematic philosophical deliberations. They are necessarily brief but Paolozzi is nonetheless able to capture in these few pages the essence as well as the legacy of Croce's voluminous philosophical contribution, which, as he points out all along, is of philosophy as the story of liberty.

Although a very short work, this is not only an excellent introduction to Croce's thought but it is also a very useful book to the Croce scholar for present reflection and future investigations. It is to be hoped that the work may soon appear in English.

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Zangrilli, Franco. *Sicilia isola-cosmo. Conversazione con G. Bonaviri*. Ravenna: Longo, 1998. Pp. 126., ISBN 88-8063-182-9.

È da una quarantina d'anni che vengono pubblicati libri-dialogo basati sulla conversazione con scrittori viventi. Il libro di Franco Zangrilli dunque fa parte di un filone relativamente nuovo di critica letteraria che intende far trasparire i pensieri dell'autore su svariatissimi argomenti e in particolare su alcuni aspetti della propria opera, il tutto sollecitato dalle domande di chi conosce la produzione letteraria molto bene.

Questo agevole volumetto è diviso in tre capitoli: il primo, intitolato "Sull'opera di Giuseppe Bonaviri" (pp. 7-38) è in parte una breve biografia dello scrittore nato a Mineo l'11 luglio 1924, laureatosi in medicina, residente da parecchi anni a Frosinone. Inoltre, vengono prese in esame soprattutto le opere narrative e poetiche dello scrittore. Il critico si sofferma sulle tematiche, sul linguaggio, sui personaggi dei romanzi e dei racconti, analizzati uno per uno, dal primo romanzo scritto nel '54 (*Il sarto della stradalunga*. Torino: Einaudi) fino a *Il dottor Bilob*, romanzo pubblicato nel 1994 (Palermo: Sellerio). Questa parte è corredata di otto pagine di fotografie che illustrano soprattutto il paese nativo di Bonaviri e i dintorni (panorama di Mineo, strada provinciale, bottega del sarto, la stradalunga, ecc.); ci sono anche due fotografie che ritraggono Bonaviri con Zangrilli (una del 1979, l'altra del 1987).

Il secondo capitolo, quello centrale ("Conversazione con Giuseppe Bonaviri", pp. 39-105), consiste di domande fatte da Franco Zangrilli e delle risposte offerte da Giuseppe Bonaviri. Le domande sono incentrate su svariatissimi argomenti e nella maggior parte facilitano una elaborazione piuttosto ricca del tema trattato. Fin dall'inizio, è chiaro che la familiarità del critico letterario non solo con la produzione letteraria, ma anche e soprattutto con la persona produce una reazione favorevole a aperture e spiegazioni sostanziose. Bonaviri fa capire proprio dalla prima domanda come Mineo, il paese nativo, sia una fonte inesauribile di ispirazione per i personaggi (pp. 42-43 e passim), per il paesaggio (pp. 55-56 e passim), per le fiabe. In particolare, il ruolo centrale delle donne e della mamma, i ricordi di cui l'aiutano a costruire la lingua "metaforica, reinventata, femminile" (p. 43), specialmente quella delle fiabe (per es., *Novelle saracene*, Milano: Mondadori, 1995). Bonaviri ha una reazione originalissima nei riguardi della Sicilia come fonte di ispirazione: "Sta quindi a chi scrive trovare in sè il meglio dei nostri avi a cui siamo indissolubilmente uniti, senza però farne pura opera di registrazione, ma facendone nuova esperienza, legata al nostro vorticoso mondo" (p. 45). Questa prospettiva di rielaborare il passato ancorandolo al presente ma con un occhio al futuro gli permette di soffermarsi non solo su alcune idee religiose (per es., rovesciando l'usuale posizione cristiana, facendo di Cristo un saraceno e puntando su possibilità paniche, non panteistiche) ma anche su tematiche filosofiche (l'idea del tempo a forma di petali di un fiore; "il tempo è come il respiro delle cellule" p. 61) e su quelle di generi letterari (la definizione della fiaba come una "progettazione futuribile di un universo sognato" p. 48). L'idea della morte come un aspetto essenziale delle creazioni letterarie viene discussa dallo

scrittore prendendo spunto da tre linee tanatologiche: una morte concreta; una astrale; una transbiologica (pp. 53-54). La conversazione tocca poi moltissime considerazioni, tra cui si possono menzionare come un assaggio le seguenti: la complessità del romanzo *L'isola amorosa* (pp. 58-59), la funzione della coralità del *Fiume di pietra* (pp. 59- 60), l'importanza della luce (pp. 62-63), la lingua della poesia (pp. 64-65), lo sperimentalismo letterario (pp. 67-68), la 'mafia letteraria' (pp. 68, 70, 71- 72, 96), la critica letteraria (pp.70-71), le storie poliziesche e *È un rosseggiar di peschi e di albicocchi* (pp. 76-80), la definizione di "dormiveglia" e il romanzo omonimo (pp. 82-88), la traduzione dei romanzi in cinese, in inglese, in francese (pp. 89-90), la poesia contro la narrativa (pp. 94-96), il paragone con Borges e Landolfi (pp. 97-98), il mangiare e il pensiero (pp. 100-101).

Il lettore di questo libro-conversazione impara anche che Bonaviri dimostra una certa impazienza nei riguardi di chi vuole fare paragoni tra lui e alcuni altri scrittori siciliani ("non vedo il motivo per cui uno scrittore siciliano deve essere sempre confrontato con altri scrittori siciliani e veramente non vedo il valore di questo confronto", p. 50), anche se, a nostro avviso, lo scrittore ne uscirebbe avvantaggiato. Inoltre, allo scrittore mineolo non piacciono i termini critici di classificazione delle sue opere letterarie e chiama l'ispirazione al primo romanzo "bio-cosmica" (p. 57), usando un'eticchetta che non rientra in nessuna classificazione tradizionale.

Il terzo capitolo ("Bibliografia essenziale", pp. 109-126), diviso in tre parti (1. Opere di Giuseppe Bonaviri, 2. Opere curate da Bonaviri, 3. Monografie, saggi e fascicoli speciali dedicati all'opera di Bonaviri) è da considerarsi un elenco completo dei lavori di e su questo scrittore.

In conclusione, questo libro-conversazione offre qualcosa di importante a tutti i tipi di lettori: per chi conosce i lavori di Bonaviri, il volumetto spiega la posizione della "poetica cosmica" dello scrittore assieme alle giustificazioni personali e professionali per certe scelte; per chi non conosce i lavori di Bonaviri, il volumetto è una spinta alla lettura di questo scrittore affascinante. Dato che Bonaviri non è alieno alla tecnologia, forse a Franco Zangrilli non dispiacerebbe nel futuro preparare un CD-ROM-intervista con lo scrittore mineolo, anche perché sono usciti altri lavori che si meritano una discussione approfondita (si pensa qui in particolare al grosso volume con una importante introduzione —già annunciato nel dialogo— *Favola, fiaba, fantastico*, Roma: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1999, e al lavoro teatrale *Giufà e Gesù*, curato da Sarah Zappulla Muscarà, Catania, La Cantinella, 2001).

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